

The Fragmented Filmmaker

Emancipating The Exhausted Artist

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Declaration

The research contained within this thesis is my own work and has not been submitted elsewhere for a PhD or comparable academic award.

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November 2014

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The Fragmented Filmmaker

Emancipating The Exhausted Artist

Abstract

This research project is a first-person, practice-led endeavour which contributes to the fields of both medical humanities and the sonic arts. Through a reflexive, auto-ethnographic process, employing a wide range of audio-visual methods, I set out to explore a range of possible creative strategies that might be available to the ‘artist in extremis’ – i.e. the artist working under conditions of illness, confinement, restriction or limited energy. This process was distilled down, over five years, to three conceptual vehicles in the form of vinyl records which sought to offer openings, strategies and responses to conditions of extreme limitation.

From 2009-2014, the three vinyl record projects were developed by myself, an ex-broadcast filmmaker continuing to navigate a life under Chronic Fatigue Syndrome / *Myalgic Encephalomyelitis* (CFS-ME) since 1998. Each vinyl record project contains strategies across a given stratum of life of the ‘exhausted artist’. The project created a body of both methodological and practical outputs, aiming to bypass the exhaustion, poor cognition and pain associated with CFS-ME.

Through ‘triangulating’ a series of sonic projects, each of which was created in a ‘modular’ or ‘bricolage’ process, the resultant trilogy of interrelated 12” vinyl records created a kind of ‘cinema for the ears’. The recordings (with their sleevenotes and

graphics) were subsequently published by both external record labels and also self-released via the University of the West of Scotland.

The Idioholism Vinyl Trilogy became an appropriate autoethnographic framework containing exercises towards a personal, 'idio-holistic' existence for a filmmaker who could no longer produce intensive film work. The expansive and attractive format of the 12" record, under the doctoral praxis, allowed for a more 'modular' approach and format than in formal filmmaking. As an ex-filmmaker who is now an exhausted artist, I postulate that a trilogy of vinyl records could hone and home the divergent media (i.e. soundtracks, spoken word, music, text, photography) – which, taken together, might have previously resulted in a complete film in my 'past' life.

The Fragmented Filmmaker

Emancipating The Exhausted Artist

Prologue

Part One: Triceratops

My three-year-old boy wants to lick my face. He stomps into the room with a beaming smile, all curls, rosy cheeks and effervescence. He is the light. I love him. He dances and he twists and he laughs and he farts. He is running about without his pants on. He asks me to put on one of my 'round and rounds' so he can dance to it. I creakily rise and put on a James Brown funky vinyl I picked up in Berlin last year. He asks me if it is a picture disc like our soundtrack of *E.T.* I say *no, it's black and smooth*. I want to join him but I'm dizzy and fall back onto the sofa. I'm struggling today.

My heavily pregnant wife is bending down, hitching up his new trousers that are patterned with big stars, then she ties his laces. She can hardly bend because she is due to give birth in twenty days and I should be doing the bending for her and the tying for him, but if I do that, then I won't have the energy to gently engage with them later. I want to get up from the sofa and take everyone out for the day, or even better, take the boy up the summit of *Goatfell* on the Isle of Arran, stick him in my back-pack and just scale it. But I can't do it. I can't exercise myself out of this illness. Big men crumble under it. Wife and boy leave the house without me.

My left arm hurts like a tennis injury. Tennis! *I wish*. Veritable tip of a veritable iceberg. Fifteen years of sweaty exhaustion from nowhere, of ferocious drawn out fevers and edge-of-your-seat alarm, missed heartbeats, oesophageal spasms, reflux and retching. Many symptoms are infuriatingly hard to articulate - 'psychophysical phenomena' is the best I can do. Others I recognize all too well, especially when I've overdone it; *hypnagogic jerks*, panic attacks, cold sweats, hot sweats, oh, and the current new foe, diabetes. And I write this having just violently emptied my bowels. I've been running to the toilet for years. It's where a lot of the thinking for this research project comes from, forged in between bouts of diarrhoea, the lost days and what feels like detention for an unknown crime and I'm still not sure what I am being charged with. Paradoxes come thick and fast. Here are a few of my favourites:

Too exhausted to sleep.

A need for warm sun, that is then too warm and too bright.

A need for a dark room that is then too miserable and which compromises my circadian rhythm.

It's too noisy, but then I'm missing out on life.

Symptoms go on relentlessly - mood swings, or the too-bright light bulb in an acceptably lit living room. Then there's the *hyperarousal* or 'falling out of my hammock' because someone disturbed me having a quiet conversation three doors away in the street. Cat on a hot tin roof. Fried. Brain fog. Edgy insomnia evolves into

total sleep reversal. For some reason I've gone 'back on nights' again. Oh and the *teeth*. There are teeth falling out at the back of my mouth, maybe because my chemistry is so acidic, and gum nerves inflame the optic nerve of my eyes. Inside them, bits of my retina have been falling off into the vitreous creating irritating and distracting floaters in my vision. Is this part of the illness too? They've been growing since I was a child. Was I already a little bit ill then?

Maybe mercury fillings are to blame. Mercury fillings removed. No difference. Diet adapted; wheat, gluten, sugar, alkaline-acid, veggie, vegan or glycaemically-friendly diet. Little real-world difference. Hard to get the amount of exercise right, too little or too much. When I'm really unwell, if I have the audacity to walk to the end of the street and back, or up a modest incline I'll be forced to spend the next 24 hours regretting every minute of it with calf muscles and sternum ligaments burning with acid-like pain.

I'm scared to view television documentaries that would have been a breeze to watch in my past life as a television documentary maker. A career that lasted eighteen months. 2013 saw the premiere of a film that a friend of mine directed, an award winning doc on a brave man with Motor Neurone Disease. I didn't make it past the tenth minute. I don't have an illness like that yet, hopefully never. There's no way I'm that ill. But does that mean I don't suffer? Or not feel bad for those worse off than me?

Thinking of those in dire straits should foster perspective, but it can make it worse knowing how easily atrophy can develop. It just makes coping with today more

difficult. My hand lies like a lead weight on the laptop. My face throbs and my thinking isn't straight. I can feel my bowels twisting or on the edge of shitting. My biceps are sore and my skin burns. My wife stroked my ankle the other night and it felt like a lit cigarette on the skin. My heart pounds and I feel toxic, as if I've been poisoned or am a hundred years old.

I stop myself writing more misery-memoir. I need that light back in the story.

The family are back. My boy asks to watch our *Jurassic Park* Blu-ray, specifically where the Triceratops has eaten the wrong berries and lies heaving on its side. He loves it for some reason. We both do. *He ate the toxic berries* I tell him. Triceratops did. And me? Maybe it was something *I* ate? For *this* long? Through losing work, relationships, through losing face, my mind, *what is wrong with me?*

With this illness, sometimes I am treated with suspicion. I've got two friends with cancer and I envy the pity and respect their condition fosters. I don't envy their illness, or their surgery, or their chemo: I'm not a *monster*. I'm not an idiot. It's those pink ribbons, or blue ribbons and of not having to explain the problem over and over again to suspicious doctors or anyone I encounter. Cancer? Job done, we understand. It's shorthand isn't it? It's shorthand for serious. What is CFS-ME shorthand for? It's shorthand for a bit tired. It's shorthand for people that weren't hard enough to *man up* (women included) or maybe they are a bit sad. Or maybe they are a bit mad. And of the paradox that a G.P. once told me in confidence that 'on the books' it looks like patients with CFS-ME are getting good treatment because they don't come back...

CFS-ME, the names, the politics, Chronic Fatigue *whatever*, what else is it shorthand for? Maybe those people are just a bit too westernised, or a bit too, well they are just wee delicate flowers aren't they? But Triceratops wasn't a wee delicate flower. No one would ever suggest it. He just ate some toxic berries. And I wish the answers to my illness were so simple. I wish I could say I had eaten some toxic berries.

So I stay here with my dead arm and I look over to my turntable. I think about last night where I stopped breathing in my sleep and woke up with a bang gasping for breath. I have just been diagnosed with sleep apnea, where this is the primary symptom. Then there's the night before, where I got my diabetes diet wrong and couldn't sleep without a low glycaemic slug of avocado and marmite at 4am.

Part Two: Jupiter's Moons from Ayrshire

A few years ago, when we'd just moved to Ayr, I went outside with my telescope, musing on the 'golden record' that was sent past the gas giants Jupiter and Saturn, on the *Voyager* probes to the edge of the solar system in the late 1970s. It was a cold January night and I had a flask of coffee and new fingerless gloves so I could operate the scope. I managed to see Jupiter up close and its moons Ganymede, Calisto, Europa and Io. All this from a back garden in Ayrshire. I visualized the probes flying past those planets carrying the precious cargo of a golden LP *record*. It's quaint and surreal to think of a record being used as our (then) cutting edge intergalactic handshake, but why not a record? It's the ultimate format for interplanetary contact. It's an orbit *in itself*. It pulls the stylus to the centre like gravity. It's a spiral. It doesn't

last long. About twenty minutes on each side. From the outside to the in, a brief life captured on a few oscillations before it hits the run-out groove...

I wanted, in the most literal sense, to record my own dispatch into the ether. It hit me that out of the defencelessness I was feeling at the time, I needed to document my own escape route, plot a trajectory from all of this illness and incarceration. I wanted to document it on something simple, pure, and a little more solid than the digital ether we are living in. I wanted to send that document out. I wanted to make a *thing* to put it all on, and not just document things, but to work out a proper coping strategy from this and to learn how to outfox the illness. Impossible? I've thrown everything into it regardless.

And so out of that chilly night air five years ago, I came back in the house and I walked over to the turntable and flicked through some records. I'd started buying vinyl again after a huge gap of twenty-five years. I pick a handful. I can barely lift them. It really hurts... but they are worth the effort. It hits me that there is something in the format, in the weight and the *gravitas* of 'proper' records that would ultimately serve as my witness – even an epitaph¹ to me after I am gone. They don't call them records for nothing.

Half a decade later, I arrive at the end of a doctoral process where I am presenting my own vinyl record trilogy at a conference on exhaustion and around other institutions. Perhaps I assumed I would be the wild card in these conferences and symposia, but it turns out that there's a logic to making a red record, a blue record

¹ Astonishingly, when I googled the word 'epitaph' the second hit of over two million results back was a record label. At the time of writing this, that was certainly the case. <http://www.epitaph.com>

and a yellow record and joining them together to transcend this controversial and relentless illness.

I made three records to articulate how I've tried to turn things around, how I've tried to furiously and aggressively sketch out some meaning from it all, and as my career as a filmmaker fragmented over the last fifteen years, what follows has arisen from that fury.

Chapter 1: Introduction

1. The research question / hypothesis
2. The rise of the 'auto'
3. Writing in the first person as an academic strategy
4. Personal experiences within doctoral research
5. Obstacles within reading and writing
6. How the records and commentary were developed
7. The structure of this text and the format and availability of the objects

Any important disease whose causality is murky, and for which treatment is ineffectual, tends to be awash in significance. (Sontag: 1978, p62)

1: The research question / hypothesis

Myalgic Encephalomyelitis, or M.E.², or Chronic Fatigue Syndrome (or Chronic Fatigue Immune Dysfunction Syndrome in the USA) is a complex and life-retarding illness that can last a lifetime, hindering the sufferer in physiological, mental and social aspects of life. I have had the illness since 1998 and was diagnosed in 1999.

Long-term severe and painful exhaustion, unimproved by rest, is the overriding and universal symptom of CFS-ME. The illness varies dramatically between sufferers regarding the multiplicity, existence, severity and development of other symptoms (and their complications). I will expand on these challenges later. A key point for this research project is that nearly every CFS-ME charity agrees that any given sufferer will experience a bespoke collection of individualistic hindrances and impairments across layers of their life. Counterpointing this – it will likely be the case that access to and the experiencing of the *multiplicity* of life is almost always compromised by CFS-ME.

There exists both a variability and universality within the illness. The universal aspect of the illness is that it affects the sufferer across the physiological, mental and social layers of one's life. At the same time, each sufferer will experience an individualistic and varying severity of symptoms and capacities within such layers. That

² In the main, I use the abbreviation CFS-ME in this document – but there are times when I need to refer to the disease as M.E. which in certain contexts has become the main term.

the illness is individualistic in where and how it attacks the sufferer has been the root impulse for my equally individualistic response to it. I produced idiosyncratic and self-reflexive art practice activities through the research process that has led to this thesis but may also be compatible with the illnesses of others as transferrable practices.

Working in divergent media, my practice is comprised of small projects in diverse subjects and formats, chiefly sonic art. However, at the same time, or perhaps because of my initial background in filmmaking, my works, despite being diverse (i.e. photographic, sonic and occasionally written) relate strongly to each other. Filmmaking is an art form that ties disciplines together. There is a sense of both 'fragment' and 'overview' in my practice that has served me well over the years, to the point where I now call myself a 'fragmented filmmaker'. Because fragment and overview have been practiced reflexively in my work, under a goal of improving my own life 'holistically' - without making myself grossly unwell - it has led me towards a research question. The research question, in which the problem of improving a multiplicity or 'holistic' breadth of life for CFS-ME sufferers, via art methodologies, is presented thus:

If three idiosyncratic contemporary art projects were developed by an averagely affected sufferer of CFS-ME, across three different, even divergent subject areas, what process and shape would such projects need to take in order to foster the practitioner with a more satisfyingly engaged existence?

This is a project about wellbeing, made through sonic art processes and objects; namely three expansive coloured vinyl records. Accompanying the soundworks are downloads, HD films, and assemblages of visual art. Each LP collates

different collections of sound and music works produced across three diverse fields in the first person.

Research questions invariably set in motion other questions:

i) Can bespoke strategies drawn from contemporary art history and their methodologies enable CFS-ME sufferers to enjoy everyday life in more satisfying and integrated ways?

ii) At the end of the research will the contemporary art practitioner have forged a kind of 'holism' through art methodologies – 'holism' being a term understood in complementary health care for example?

iii) How can the kind of pain, exhaustion and cognitive difficulties of the illness which usually prevents activity of many kinds, be usurped, negated or negotiated with?

iv) What is actually going on during the art practice? Is it merely an enterprise to distract the sufferer for a few moments? What happens when that distraction ends?

This seems an appropriate place to introduce the kinds of projects that formed my own response to these issues. Working closely with an abandoned and decrepit harmonium in the Scottish borders was one example, as was forging Twitter-length statements about the universe. These tactics may not be on the medical map, but to artists, interventions like these are a way of life and are at the core of this doctoral project – as responses to this chronic illness. What underpins such interventions is

explored between the records themselves, the sleevenotes, associated imagery and this text.

Three records in three different cultural areas were postulated as the minimum number of objects with their unique processes, which, if created so deliberately different from each other, might form crossovers and overlaps of experiences in the practitioner.

Why three records?

One record may have explored a very singular arc. If *two* records/areas were chosen for the research project, there would have been a danger of producing a slightly misleading (albeit interesting) 'mirroring' of one aspect of existence with another, whereas with three projects, a sense of breadth becomes the goal.

It is when we introduce a *third* record that we do not form a singular trajectory (as in *one* project), nor a project that compares or contrasts phenomena (as in *two*). It was my experimental proposition that if the subject matter of each record in a trilogy, was idiosyncratically diverse to those surrounding it, then there was a chance that a methodology in sync with CFS-ME could be located which might improve one's relationship to illness. Having three records/projects permits *just enough* diversity in the practitioner's life to generate an array of potential art-strategies, whilst crucially, not overwhelming or exhausting oneself. It is a very delicate balance. Whilst this is not, strictly speaking, a social science experiment, perhaps an analogy can be drawn from social science theory by looking at the term *triangulation*:

Triangulation refers to the use of more than one approach to the investigation of a research question in order to enhance confidence in the ensuing findings. Since much social research is founded on the use of a single research method and as such may suffer from limitations associated with that method or from the specific application of it, triangulation offers the prospect of enhanced confidence. Triangulation is one of the several rationales for multimethod research. The term derives from surveying, where it refers to the use of a series of triangles to map out an area.

(Bryman, 2011, p.1142)

Three projects (I term a 'trilogy' or 'trinity') provide the sick practitioner with some options. I found aspects of some projects stronger than others regarding their efficacy in 'treating' my condition. This is perhaps because of the unpredictability of the illness. Some of my projects required light walking, others required light thinking. Some projects required what I sometimes refer to as 'heavier cognition' and some failed altogether. My thinking is stronger on some days, and my walking on others; the same is true of my listening, my ability to record an interview to a professional level or focus a photograph for publication on one of the LPs is variable on any given day.

The idea of triangulation, at least in the context of my making three collections of art strategies was not a panacea to cope with illness, nor do I define the project as the kind of triangulation with its specific context in the social sciences. But when there is such variability in the illness, triangulation could be an interesting idea for the

exhausted artist who on one day may be cognitively strong, whilst on other days prefer aesthetically led practices.

However, as Bryman continues, when seen in context, triangulation cannot negate every research method nor can be seen as covering all critical enquiry. Instead, with this caveat in mind, triangulation is a useful conceptual (and methodological) construct in terms of 'richness' - a goal of the vinyl trilogy:

The idea of triangulation has been criticized on several grounds. First, it is sometimes accused of subscribing to a naive realism that implies that there can be a single definitive account of the social world. Such realist positions have come under attack from writers aligned with constructionism and who argue that research findings should be seen as just one among many possible renditions of social life. On the other hand, writers working within a constructionist framework do not deny the potential of triangulation; instead, they depict its utility in terms of adding a sense of richness and complexity to an inquiry.

(ibid, p.1142)

My use of triangulation in the project exists primarily as a useful allegory; that three projects aimed at three divergent areas of life may be the minimum to simply and gently introduce a sense of dynamism to the practitioner's life. In regards to my vinyl trilogy, some components of the work were completed in 24 hours. Others took a year or more, depending on which aspect of my life the illness was attacking. Because there were three projects, I always had a different project to turn to, more attuned to

that given condition on that given day in order to build up a large body of work over a five-year period.

The projects were also designed with an economy of energy in order to tread lightly with the illness. Or put another way, I made the works until I fell ill with each one, and 'reined in' any project that worsened my condition. This can only be done in the first person as sufferers of chronic illnesses like CFS-ME may have different symptoms or similar symptoms with different emphases.

The LP records and packages are the results of one over-arching experimental art practice unique to this author. By demonstrating such an idiosyncratic approach in this project, where do such first-person projects then find their place critically?

2: The rise of the 'auto'

In *Illness as Metaphor* (Sontag, 1978) Susan Sontag states that medicine for many has abdicated its caring role. In such a landscape, she describes how abandoned sufferers of incurable chronic illnesses feel alienated and are used as cultural scapegoats when their illness is not understood. It has been my experience that where medicine fails chronically ill sufferers of such misunderstood conditions, people may turn to experimental and experiential strategies.

An artist's take on illness, especially their own, is a tactic that is gaining interest in both the academic and cultural sphere. For example, Jacqueline Donachie's reflexive art-publication *DM* (Donachie, 2002) is an autoethnographic and autobiographical

illness narrative where the artist explores her own family's vulnerability to Myotonic Dystrophy, which affects muscle function and can be a terminal disease. This line of research expanded over several years resulting in Donachie's subsequent collaborative installation-show and publication *Tomorrow Belongs to Me* (Donachie & Monckton, 2006). In the publication and exhibition, she draws her autoethnography/biography closer to the institution by collaborating with one of the University of Glasgow's Professors of Genetics, Darren G. Monckton, with whom she builds on previous collaborations between art and science processes and protocols.

Donachie's project was 'born', however, from her own body and that of her sister in which the enquiry began. One could say the project was born from the inside out, or from the first-person outwards. And perhaps one could also add that she built a bridge from insider-research to outsider in the process through her collaboration with Monckton. Examples like these mirror the increasingly common 'practice-led PhD', or 'autoethnography' and spawn terms like 'illness narrative' as emerging fields and methods within the medical humanities and at the core of artists' PhD projects.

Despite autoethnography and emergent first-person cultural research being contested for its inevitable subjectivity, such research may be celebrated for the same reason. This research project is concerned with efficacy, and takes the opportunity of charting the bewildering and personal experiences of illness at the doctoral level of art practice as research. The rise of *autosomatography*³ or the 'disability/body' memoir is a cultural example of first-person or 'self-reflexive' research, where a marginalised

³ Term observed in *Signifying Bodies - Disability in Contemporary Life Writing* G. T Couser 2009, p2, 4, 7, 11-12, 164

fragment of society implements and modifies critical theory through (often personalised, politicised or idiosyncratic) practice-led methods.

The rise of the *auto* in response to chronic illnesses like Chronic Fatigue Syndrome / Myalgic Encephalomyelitis (and Encephalopathy - terms expanded in chapter two) often arises out of needs that are not being met medically, and as a consequence the researcher may also be (the same person as) the researched. Such work is sometimes seen as protest or activism, but it may develop from a practical need to simply improve the quality of life for the sufferer, where neither pharmacological solutions nor societal respect for the illness are in ready supply.

This is not a medical PhD, nor is it social science. This is a practice-led doctorate where the practice is sonic and visual art, with commentary frequently in the first person. Although it will result in something to read here, and experience with the records themselves, its aim is something to *do* and something to *be* when assailed by forms of incarceration.

Chronic Fatigue Syndrome or CFS-ME is a disease whose causality is murky. Short of a panacea, interventions will remain maverick-like for the foreseeable future.

This is one of them.

3: Writing in the first person as an academic strategy

It is common to read academic texts in the 'third person' (i.e. neither 'me' nor 'you' but distanced, even 'omnipotent'). However, in this project, to adopt such a tone would require a kind of 'acting' - even a kind of deceit or pretence of a viewpoint that would be inauthentic. I would be creating a 'character' - externalising my own 'embodied' research. One would need to perform a kind of 'conjoined' trick in order to be two researchers, one first-person and one third-person. It is logical therefore, that the first-person viewpoint should be the unavoidable, primary and authentic voice.

One might assume that the personal viewpoint (or the first person "I") could be acceptable only in the artworks themselves, and that the thesis would serve to 'objectively' place them neatly in the contexts in which they belong. And of course, this is a perfectly reasonable request. However, the 'embodied' predicament of my health authored and dictated the manner of how the work was made and subsequently written about. I was at the centre of such a predicament and it was not a place where objectivity was neither possible nor desirable, because the disease is very 'site-specific' and particular to me. I cannot even speculate if other CFS-ME sufferers are undergoing a similar experience given that CFS-ME as a phenomena, is a shifting melange of pain and fatigue moving around different parts of the body in turn, including the psyche.

If we understand the term 'mood-swings' and the association that word has with the unreliability of a constant, defined character, then we may see a parallel problem regarding the unreliable 'location' of CFS-ME (body-swings? mind-body swings?). One of the problems of the illness, frequently discussed in the patient groups

I belong to, is that there is little apparent permanent location or 'shape' of the illness in the 'host' – or the sufferer. It would be impossible to speak about these kinds of phenomena as an external, objective observer with any real insight.

Pat Thomson is Professor of Education at The University of Nottingham. In a blog post on her widely-read site dealing with PhD research methodologies and academic culture, 'Patter', she makes a strong argument for writing in the first person within academic contexts. Moreover, she speaks of the inappropriateness and limitations of the third person voice in academic writing where the subject or field *itself* necessitates a personal response. In this following text, she gives a particular example where the third-person view, while claims to be objective, can be an unreasoned mode of writing in academic texts, and Thomson flags a paradox where the researcher messily appears *nowhere and everywhere* in third-person perspectives.

A little more than two decades ago, feminist scholars for example argued that the use of the third person in academic writing was a masculinist strategy intended to create the impression of an objective view that did not exist. Instead of resorting to what Donna Haraway (1988) described as a 'god trick', in which the researcher appears nowhere and everywhere via the use of the third person, it was imperative to explicitly situate the researcher in the text. If the reader could find out about the research writer, then they could make judgments about the situated and particular nature of what was being offered to them. One way for the researcher to make herself visible was through the use of the first person. The use of 'I' allowed the reader to

understand that the research was a social construction, just like any other form of knowledge...

...And I want to say in addition, here and now, that it's almost impossible to get the researcher out of their text. Writing in the third person doesn't do it.

(Thomson, 2013, n.p.)

But not everyone is excited about first-person research. A practice-based researcher, Mitch Miller, in his 2013 *Dialectographer's Press and Journal* (Miller, 2013, n.p.) - an ongoing autoethnographic project, warns of this tension from within some academic schools of thought:

Debate continues within ethnographic scholarship over the comparative value of outsider and insider perspectives. Anthropologists such as Kate Fox have been somewhat dismissive of insider research, the stance bound into their own sense of status and the validity of their profession.

(Miller, 2013, n.p.)

[Those] who are most 'fluent' in their rituals, customs and traditions of a particular culture generally lack the detachment necessary to explain the 'grammar' of these practices in an intelligible manner. This is why we have anthropologists.

(Fox, 2004, p.3 in Miller, 2013, n.p.)

Social scientists have long debated whether their knowledge is objective (etic) or subjective (emic). In Philip Kottak's *Mirror for Humanity: a Concise Introduction to Cultural Anthropology* (Kottak, 2009) there is a clear definition of these terms:

An emic approach investigates how local people think. How do they perceive and categorise the world? What are their rules for behaviour? What has meaning for them? How do they imagine and explain things? Operating emically, the ethnographer seeks the "native viewpoint", relying on local people to explain things and to say whether something is significant or not. The term cultural consultant, or 'informant', refers to individuals the ethnographer gets to know in the field, the people who teach him or her about their culture, who provide the emic perspective. The etic (scientist oriented) approach shifts the focus from local observations, categories, explanations, and interpretations to those of the anthropologist. The etic approach realises that members of a culture often are too involved in what they are doing to interpret their cultures impartially. Operating etically, the ethnographer emphasises what he or she (the observer) notices and considers important. As a trained scientist, the ethnographer should try to bring an objective and comprehensive viewpoint to the study of other cultures. Of course, the ethnographer, like any other scientist, is also a human being with cultural blinders that prevent cultural objectivity.

(Kottak, 2009, p.53)

There can be both interplay and tension between these insider/outsider fields. In *Views from inside and outside: Integrating emic and etic insights about culture and justice judgment* (Morris, Leung, Ames, Lickel: 1999) in the table 'Assumptions of Emic and Etic Perspectives and Associated Methods' (p. 783), the emic is summarised in the following points as:

...Any behaviour [which] is described at source from the perspective of cultural insiders, in constructs drawn from the insider's views and understanding... The working 'whole' of such a cultural system can be described from the insider's observations, gathered without the imposition of the researcher's constructs... (Morris et al, 1999, p.783)

The same table suggests that emic texts and their contents can be used as *a window into indigenous thinking about justice* and that the emic view '*describe[s] the system as a working whole*' (ibid). Conversely, the etic is seen as:

...Behaviour described from a vantage external to the culture, in constructs that apply equally well to other cultures ...Describe[s] the ways in which cultural variables fit into general causal models of a particular behaviour...
(ibid)

That 'justice' and 'wide-ranging observation' are flagged as qualities of the emic is particularly pertinent to this project. My records and their divergent subject areas, made over several years, are based on such 'wide-ranging observations' over various

'settings' with the motivation to identify and address the problem, being a kind of 'justice.' The authors go on to discuss the differences between the two strategies and show how the interplay between the practices can ultimately lead to a 'dual perspective' account, leading to an integrative explanatory framework where research strategies could cross over between emic and etic approaches.

In this research project, alongside looking at the world of other artists who work directly with illness and wellbeing, and studying wider cultural practices (such as bricolage) as a primary methodology, I have also sought to maintain balance between first-person research and the cultural anchors which surround it.

4: Personal experiences within doctoral research

The Ethnographic Field

The anthropologist Lejla Voloder, in her paper *Autoethnographic Challenges: Confronting Self, Field and Home* (Voloder, 2008) borrows references that back up the idea that "personal experiences are sources of knowledge" (p 29) and that "ethnographic endeavour may not only be defined in clear movements in and out of the field" (ibid). She proposes that there has existed a form of anthropology that was highly local to the researcher - '*anthropology at home*' (p 30) which sometimes unsettles the home/field dichotomy. This resembles, to an extent, my own research terrain, where I am both researcher and researched.

In *Creating Autoethnographies* by Tessa Muncey (2010) there is an early section of the book that sets out to validate this practice. The following quote is especially thoughtful regarding people writing / working around their illnesses:

In order to take the leap in creating an autoethnography one has to recognise that there is no distinction between doing research and living a life. The person who suffers from a long-term condition cannot be separated from the researcher investigating it, who has him/herself experience of the condition. Just as a counsellor is both a therapist and a client, the autoethnographer is both the researcher and researched. (Muncey, 2010, p.3)

5: Obstacles within reading and writing

One of the symptoms of CFS-ME is the 'fogging' of clear and precise cognitive thought - a common casualty of the illness. Prior to beginning this project, my research practice had been biased towards a very sensory-orientated art practice-as-research. After completing my first degree, in 1994, (and especially after I 'officially' contracted CFS-ME in 1998/9) my life became a series of 'sensory' modes of learning. This is because reading became cognitively difficult for me, as did writing - alongside anything that involved mental or physical endurance. However, I was always working on projects (and even commissions) and eventually my work adapted to my primary 'teacher' – the illness itself. Any intellectual insights I gleaned during this time had primarily arisen from sensory-based methods; via photography, via listening (usually

whilst field recording) and via assembling sonic compositions. But there is a sense that this wasn't knowledge in the sense of empirical 'facts' that could be communicated in a text, instead this knowledge was more akin to a kind of experience, and served only to improve my own life.

When I began the doctoral project, these expansive processes were formally identified, honed and refined to as sharp a degree as possible during the research project, resulting in art objects (as multiple vinyl LPs) 'framed' by graphic design and artwork and writing (sleevenotes and this exegesis) as opposed to the project being completely forged from written ideas, or sourced from a written template.

Without the development of the increasingly common artist's PhD, where aesthetically orientated doctoral practices are recognised as tools of articulation, I would have been unable to pursue a more conventional PhD. My illness and difficulty in cognising large chunks of text whilst exhausted and in pain would compromise a purely theoretical endeavour, whereas my art practice is utterly tuned to my illness and to a degree, initially bypasses a degree of cognition, being a sensory orientated enterprise.

Reading is even more difficult for me than writing. When I am writing sentences like these, I tend to be doing so from my own experience. I am close to such experiences and therefore it requires less energy to locate and reflect on them than filtering weighty text-based resources written by others.

Therefore, it may be ironic that as an artist-researcher, I have been, to a large extent following a fairly traditional reading/writing approach in tandem with the practical work. However, this has been an especially slow process for me. A slim book that would take an afternoon for my healthier wife to read, can take me two weeks to digest with stringent note taking. It can take a day's energy to read few paragraphs of a book or journal, ascertain its relevance and usefulness before inserting it into a document in the relevant place. Those kinds of day *are* worth the enlightenment this kind of research reaps, but such days create a 'debt' of energy that can take days to 'pay off'.

Moreover, what defines a 'text' for artists, may be different from established forms of academic research such as books or a journal article. Artists may flag artworks and LP records as texts as at least as equal bedfellows as academic journals for example. These objects, I feel, engage the psyche at least as equally as traditionally accepted forms of citation. I could therefore, refer to the vinyl trilogy as being the central text, with this text being the exegesis.

6: How the records and commentary were developed

The process I undertook could be described as a 'praxis', where the practice-based methods of an arts practice and resulting potential for ideas were tested in the first person (but with an eye on the degree in which the methods would be communicable outside of the project). An attempt in creating a contemplative, rationalised and (ultimately) realised product was the *modus operandi* that would not

only allow for the objects to be created, but allow the creation of this exegesis also, which was part of the reciprocal endeavour. In other words, the text and the practice needed each other. The records are a result of both.

In the beginning, the motivation to begin such a process was the random injustice of my declining health and the degree in which I must to adapt to change. In the last fifteen years of my life, I have needed to constantly listen to the symptoms, then offering adaptations, testing them and continuing in this manner. This has been analogous to the process of this research project. Havi Carel, in *Illness* (Carel, 2008) speaks of a similar 'plasticity' of method:

Being able to improvise and create new ways of compensating for a lost capacity shows the plasticity of behaviour and the human capacity to adjust to change. ...Some sociologists of health such as Simon Williams have described illness as a 'biological disruption'. The disruption is of taken for granted assumptions and behaviours (especially focusing on the body, which no longer "passes us by in silence" as Jean-Paul Sartre says) and of the explanatory framework (raising questions such as "why me?").

(Carel, 2010, pp.82-83)

So that after the initial anger in being ill, one must reflect to instigate any change, which has been a method I have employed in this project. That Western philosophy has focused on the contemplative lifestyle is the subject of Hannah Arendt's *The Human Condition* (Arendt, 1958). The contemplative life (*vita*

contemplativa) she argues is not engaged with life at all (*vita activa*) (p20). In contrast, Arendt also hails a “praxis” (p185) the highest and most important level of this active life. She emphasizes political *action*, and praises it accordingly.

It is the spirit of *vita activa* that has fostered this project.

7: The structure of this text and the format and availability of the objects

The first goal of the rest of this text is to identify and articulate the symptoms and challenges those with CFS-ME encounter on a daily basis, which is explored in ‘Chapter 2 - What is CFS-ME?’

Fusing the medical with the creative, once I have outlined the shape of the illness and the typical obstacles in it, I will shift attention to narratives of “Artists in Extremis” in Chapter 3, where I will introduce three case studies outside of this project to chart a sense of lineage I’ve hoped to align the project towards.

After this, I open up a particular methodology as being critical to ‘the exhausted artist’ – that of ‘bricolage’. In Chapter 4, I unpack how bricolage is part of mainstream culture citing examples in music, film other cultural forms but with specific regard of music and sound work, which is given greater magnification in Chapter 5, which expands on and explores the sonic contexts the project is located in, with specific regard to the form of vinyl records.

Next, we encounter two expansive chapters; Chapter 6 and 7. Following the previous contextual chapters, these are two pivotal and related chapters that attempt to anchor the conceptual core of the research project. The aim of these chapters is to argue for the project as a 'holistic enterprise', but also to define holism in multifarious contexts. By briefly surveying aspects of the idea of 'holism' the aim is to uncover 'pluralities of holism', including radical, individualistic terms such as 'idioholism', a term that has been developed by my own process. Given that trajectories of artists can be non-linear or occasionally difficult to pin down, this was an opportunity to survey what I term examples of 'idioholistic exercises' from the canons of other artists working loosely within a wellbeing culture. A cluster of texts are cited here, illustrating that even with such an idiosyncratic doctorate, I have attempted to locate examples of artists expounding D.I.Y. practices aligned to wellbeing. The chapter on 'idioholism' also examines the terms 'idios kosmos' (private cosmos or world) and 'koinos kosmos' (shared cosmos or world) to illustrate the interplay between first person or 'phenomenological' perspectives against and within that of the shared cultural universe.

Before the conclusion, but after an introduction in Chapter 8, we arrive at a section that reproduces verbatim the sleevenotes of the records themselves. Here is the compacted textual and more diary-like account of how the combination of bricolage, CFS-ME, and accounts of my own life as an ex-documentary filmmaker have been assembled track by track to form three vinyl records. It is here we uncover the records, the examples of work that the reader of this exegesis must also encounter by obtaining the physical objects themselves. Each sleevenote account was written a year

apart from each other, and was extracted directly from the physical LP records themselves.

Finally we arrive at the conclusion, which also includes an account of a symposium of exhaustion, which took place in October 2013 where the project was launched (in the form of a twenty minute paper / presentation at the University of Kent). The conclusion begins by exploring the current terrain of arts Practice as Research (PaR) in relation to the project before listing, with illustrations, every physical and digital release that sprung from the project. As well as the symposium on exhaustion, I also describe other conferences and publications in which the project has been involved, any terminology developed by the process, and other contributions to knowledge the project has hopefully demonstrated, ending with a brief self-reflective evaluation of the entire project.

Chapter 2: What is CFS-ME⁴?

1. CFS-ME - Nomenclature
2. The medical encounter
3. Basics - the primary symptoms of CFS-ME
4. CFS-ME research and current interventions
5. Mindfulness, a cheap panacea?
6. The entrepreneurial side of CFS-ME
7. CFS-ME in popular culture or *Suki, go to the well*
8. CFS-ME and thinking oneself well

⁴ In this chapter, occasional use of the term “ME’ or “M.E.” is used in an historical and contextual narrative and I explain within it why CFS-ME (or ME-CFS) becomes the strategical term employed in the UK today.

*You spend half of the morning, just trying to wake up
Half the evening, just trying to calm down*

(Feather by Feather: Morrison, 2003, n.p.)

1) CFS-ME - Nomenclature

Most doctors now accept that ME/CFS/PVFS is a genuine and disabling illness. The World Health Organisation classifies ME as a disease of the central nervous system... ..and the [UK] Department of Health officially recognises it to be a ‘debilitating and distressing condition⁵’. However, disagreements and uncertainties remain – especially over nomenclature, causation and the most appropriate forms of management.

(Shepard and Chaudhuri, 2001, p.1)

Such ‘management’ of the condition in my own case has ultimately taken the form of my art practice, which is never divorced from my daily life. My vinyl trilogy, as idiosyncratic and art-based a response to health as it is, has arisen as a logical response to the illness.

As I hinted in Chapter 1, there are many names for Chronic Fatigue Syndrome (CFS), which is the UK medical establishment’s preferred term. Different terms exist worldwide such as Chronic Fatigue Immune Dysfunction Syndrome (CFIDS) Myalgic

⁵ reference: House of Commons debate, 13/11/91, Hansard col 582W

Encephalomyelitis (ME) Myalgic Encephalopathy (also ME) and Post-viral Fatigue Syndrome (PVFS) Debate continues between patients, physicians, psychiatrists, lobby groups and governmental bodies about whether these terms are all describing the same illness. In much of this chapter I use the historical abbreviation M.E. as it is only in recent years the increasingly common “ME-CFS / CFS-ME” term is seen in the UK.

ME (Myalgic Encephalomyelitis) is a name which was originally introduced in a *Lancet* editorial (Leading Article, 1956) to describe people with the illness who had been admitted to London’s Royal Free Hospital during 1955. Clinically, Myalgic was used to refer to the characteristic muscle symptoms; encephalomyelitis to the brain symptoms. Pathologically, encephalomyelitis indicates inflammation within the brain and spinal cord – pathology for which there is now very limited evidence.

(Shepard and Chaudhuri, 2001, p.1)

In the UK the definition popular in the pre-1990s, was supplied by the media: ‘yuppie flu’ inferring that the illness was a result of capitalist greed, a stereotype sufferers and researchers fought hard to eradicate. But ‘ME’ was at this point the abbreviation of choice.

‘ME’ when used to abbreviate Myalgic *Encephalopathy* (as opposed to Encephalomyelitis) is a newer, and often preferred term within patients and perhaps lower numbers of medical practitioners:

The ME Association plans to substitute the word encephalomyelitis with encephalopathy, meaning an abnormality of brain function. We believe that encephalopathy is now the most appropriate description for the various central nervous system abnormalities (i.e. hypothalamic, autonomic and cognitive dysfunction; cerebral hypoperfusion) that have been reported...

(ibid, p.1)

And what of ‘Chronic Fatigue Syndrome?’

CFS (Chronic Fatigue Syndrome) is the name currently favoured by the medical profession⁶ because it makes no firm assumption about cause. Two major criticisms of CFS as a name are that it fails to reflect the severity of the illness and it has become a convenient label for anyone with unexplained fatigue.

(ibid, p.1)

⁶ Note: in the USA and Canada it is termed Chronic Fatigue *Immune Dysfunction Syndrome*, implying either that these countries know something that the UK doesn’t, or doesn’t want to admit to, or it’s a projection or kind of conjecture.

2) The medical encounter

Sociologist Lesley Cooper's paper *Myalgic Encephalomyelitis and the Medical Encounter* remains a relevant primer on the fraught terrain of terminology and ownership of the illness. Despite being published in 1997, not a great deal has changed.

...[patient groups] prefer the term ME, as opposed to psychiatrists and some medical researchers who use the term CFS or Chronic Fatigue Syndrome. In the history of ME, definitions, nomenclature and classifications have varied from country to country, and also amongst groups of researchers. Terms have been based on place (such as 'Akureyri Disease' after an epidemic in a town in Iceland), on symptoms, and on hypothesised aetiologies, often reflecting different ideologies and interests of the groups involved.

(Cooper, 1997, p.188)

Moreover, when the patient (in my words) 'reaches the end of the line with healthcare providers', a doctor may tell patient X that 'you don't have a disease we can see clearly, so you are either well, or have CFS-ME'. Either way the patient somehow feels short-changed from the encounter and whilst given a title, after a while feels not 'legitimately' ill. Another quote from Cooper flags the importance regarding such legitimacy of one's illness:

In the history of twentieth century western medicine, several 'syndromes' have been denied the legitimate status of 'organic disease'. I shall entitle these syndromes 'non-diseases' or 'illegitimate illnesses', because they neither fit the category of organic disease, nor do they have the status of legitimate illnesses. Hypoglycaemia (Singer et al. 1984), Repetitive Strain Injury (RSI) (Arksey 1994), Candidiasis, Multiple Chemical Sensitivity, Myalgic Encephalomyelitis (ME) and Chronic Fatigue Syndrome (CFS) are all examples of such non-diseases, being generally defined in terms of symptoms, with uncertain aetiology and pathogenesis. ...Where generally a biomedical disease name represents the symbolic legitimization of the ideology of expertise... ...I would argue that in this particular arena, the label ME has come to serve as a symbol for the usurpation of power from doctors by patients.

(Cooper, 1997, p.188)

3) Basics - the primary symptoms of CFS-ME

“ME” as it is more commonly known in the UK, (or, as I refer to it throughout this text CFS-ME) is a long-term (chronic) fluctuating (or not) illness with symptoms affecting many bodily systems, commonly that of the nervous and immune system. There is wide-ranging severity and chronicity, from those who are able to work with some reduced ability, right through to 25% of sufferers who are house-bound or bed-bound and need full-time care. Outside of suicide, a morbidity study concluded that

early cancer and heart failure are risks for some⁷. It is nearly always highly disabling and can be for life. It is also difficult to prove and consequently an easy illness to fake.

What follows is a fuller list of common symptoms of ME from N.H.S. Scotland's "Scottish Good Practice Statement on ME-CFS" (Purdie, G. 2010). The following is aimed at General Practitioners, to assist in the diagnosis of such patients and to follow protocols of good medical practice for patients 'diagnosed' with CFS-ME.

- **Fatigue** – a significant degree of new onset, unexplained persistent or recurrent physical and mental fatigue or malaise that substantially reduces activity level.
- **Post exertional malaise and/or fatigue** – loss of previous physical and mental stamina and rapid fatigability, malaise and/or pain and a worsening of other symptoms that the patient may have. The recovery period is prolonged – 24 hours or longer is common.
- **Sleep disturbance** – hypersomnia, insomnia, reversed or chaotic diurnal sleep rhythms and unrefreshing sleep.
- **Pain** – significant myalgia is common. Arthralgia without swelling, redness or joint deformity, may be present. Muscle and/or joint pain can be experienced which is often widespread and migratory in nature.

⁷ Suicide is one of the three main causes of death in CFS (heart failure and cancer being the other two) – source: *Causes of Death Among Patients with Chronic Fatigue Syndrome* (Jason et al, 2006)

- **Headaches** – are often present, usually migraine or tension type but a variety of patterns and severity may occur.
- **Cognitive symptoms** - almost always present - particularly sluggish or ‘fogging’ of thinking, poor attention/concentration and forgetfulness. Perceptual and sensory disturbances may be experienced – e.g. inability to focus vision. Hypersensitivity to light (photophobia) or noise (hyperacusis), are common problems⁸.
- **Neurological symptoms** – muscle twitches, spasms and weakness - are common occurrences.
- **Postural light-headedness, dizziness, pallor, palpitations** – are common features. Postural light headedness/dizziness may lead to an unsteady gait. An increase in heart rate may suggest Postural Orthostatic Tachycardia Syndrome (POTS).
- **Paraesthesia** - peri-oral and peripheral paraesthesia (*skin sensations of burning, fizzing or tingling – author’s experience / interpretation*).
- **Flu-like symptoms** - recurrent symptoms of sore throat; tender, painful and/or swollen lymph nodes. Feeling of fever, shivering and/or temperature fluctuation, sweating episodes, cold intolerance, cold extremities, intolerance of extremes of heat and cold.

⁸ On a personal level, I developed the analogy of a computer with ‘low RAM’ to ‘hold’ information in the head at any one time. As a result of this, there is an entire chapter devoted to using ‘bricolage’ in expressing this phenomenon.

- **Nausea**

- **Irritable bowel symptoms**

- **Altered appetite** – anorexia or abnormal appetite, loss of adaptability and worsening of symptoms with stress. Marked weight change may also be a feature and can be exacerbated by stress.

- **Urinary symptoms** - frequency and urgency
(Purdie, 2010, pp.6-7)

In the fifteen years since my diagnosis, I have experienced most of these symptoms, and this list is by no means exhaustive. At the time of writing this sentence, I have had *all* these symptoms (and more) in the last 72 hours. Indeed, because the net of symptoms can be cast so wide, it is no surprise that questions could be raised as to whether ME sufferers all have the same disease or not.

4) CFS-ME research and current interventions

The National Health Service now acknowledges that the tide is changing as to whether or not CFS-ME is a physical illness. The NHS Scotland Good Practice Statement flags that:

...there is accumulating evidence of a number of nervous system, immune, neuroendocrine, autonomic and other abnormalities in patients with ME - CFS. However, as yet, no definitive laboratory test (or tests) has been found for ME - CFS, which must remain a crucial research priority for the diagnosis, classification and sub-typing of this disease.)

(Purdie, 2010, p.32)

Unfortunately, in 2011, a large blow was dealt to ME research by the retraction of papers in publications *Science* and *Nature*⁹ (Cressy, D, 2011) linking the illness with the retrovirus XMRV. The discovery of this link in 2009 had sparked hope in many sufferers and a cautious sense of 'eureka' was experienced in both research circles and in the ME community. However, the integrity of the research was questioned¹⁰, resulting in full author retractions.

On the other hand, 2011 also saw a Norwegian study¹¹ (Fluge and Mella, 2009) linking *Methotrexate and Rituximab*¹² both (aggressive) chemotherapy drugs, in influencing some positive results in patients with CFS-ME. This kind of discovery is rare, and veteran sufferers of the illness have learned to play down the constant oscillation between discovery and disappointment. More results are anticipated from further studies. Addictive antidepressants and barbiturates are still the most popular pharmacological solutions in order to quell a typical CFS-ME nervous system from

⁹ <http://www.nature.com/news/xmr-v-paper-withdrawn-1.9720>

¹⁰ <http://www.sciencemag.org/content/334/6063/1636.1.full>

¹¹ <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2711959/>

¹² <http://esme-eu.com/treatment/a-drug-for-me-cfs-the-rituximab-story-article468-110.html>

‘hyper-arousal’, a state where the body is constantly over-adrenalised. Moreover, in retaining baggage from a previous historical (even hysterical) mental illness view of CFS-ME, Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) is still being promoted as the mainstream but controversial therapeutic model alongside ‘graded exercise’, which many sufferers have found unsuccessful, and some even harmful. (Cognitive Behaviour Therapy is a process that had its roots in treating negative emotions in depression and asks the sufferer to start observing how these emotions arise, leading to mutually agreed goals of changing one’s behaviour and subsequent patterns of unhelpful actions.)

5) Mindfulness, a cheap panacea?

There is no single pill to reach for in treating the condition. ‘Mindfulness’ – literally a form of paying attention, an offshoot of Buddhist meditation, is being promoted by some hospitals as a new way of treating the illness because it claims to look at the ‘whole’ person and encourages paying attention to the body’s warning signs of when to rest and when not to. Given that my research project is concerned with a kind of ‘wholeness’ or ‘holism’ it is important to briefly investigate current vogues of any practice aimed to enhance the life of ‘the whole person’ of which mindfulness is part.

Whilst there are major texts on mindfulness such as Jon Kabat-Zinn’s *Full Catastrophe Living* (Kabat-Zinn 1991) and Buddhist teacher (and Nobel peace prize

nominee) Thích Nhất Hạnh's influential *The Miracle of Mindfulness* (Nhất Hạnh, 1987), it doesn't dilute the message to say this is nothing more than the practice of paying attention to the task in hand. Of course, one could unpick that concept greatly (as these texts do) but mindfulness in my life has served to isolate unhelpful thoughts or unpleasant sensations – when they arise, they are addressed, accepted or moved on from and one returns to the present moment. Whilst that sounds glib, mindfulness is a frequently useful and practical tool. If one wants to explore Buddhist texts more deeply, there are volumes of sutras (Sanskrit) and suttas (Pali) that outline the roots of the practice. At Buddhist retreats where some of the more immersive forms of mindfulness are taught I have encountered a large number of CFS-ME sufferers. It is a curious thought, but one which has implications for this project, that CFS-ME sufferers are trying remedies ahead of what might be considered useful by orthodox medical practitioners. Buddhism and mindfulness practice was the first encounter I had which seemed to help me work within the condition a little. I assumed this would be a maverick approach in 1999 when I went to my first retreat, but I was not alone in the condition when I arrived. There is at least some interest from neuroscientists in mindfulness practice. Mark Vernon's *Wellbeing* (Vernon, 2008) features multiple entries on mindfulness – although he uses the term 'spiritual':

Spiritual exercises... have interestingly been called an "off button" for the self. What neuroscience has shown is that during meditation, and in particular the Buddhist practice of mindfulness, the brain's parietal lobes, the parts that help an individual locate where they are in space, become cut off. The lobes are still working: still trying to establish

where the individual is and where the boundaries of their physical presence lie. But they don't have enough sensory information to complete the task.

(Vernon, 2008, pp.88-89)

6) The 'entrepreneurial sector' of CFS-ME

My own work is a fairly expansive coping strategy regarding the illness; it is a somewhat individualistic and idiosyncratic in its approach. In untethered and experimental territory one may also find a number of 'fringe' treatments as bedfellows. I've found some slightly unorthodox treatments effective; acupuncture, manual lymphatic drainage (soft neck and lymph massage), hot stone massage and – at one point, becoming vegetarian, then vegan. At one point I had almost decided to become a Buddhist monk, which I eventually dropped. Homeopathy I found to be useless. But I've used magnets, experimental diets (with some success) but have always viewed the various free-market solutions on offer with some suspicion.

Journalist John Diamond's autobiography of cancer *Snake Oil and Other Preoccupations*, which is in part a largely dismissive personal account of holistic health culture, features an equally caustic quote by Richard Dawkins in the introduction:

When the pathologist has read the runes; when the oracles of X-ray, CT scan and biopsy have spoken and hope is guttering low... it is then that the 'alternative' or 'complementary' vultures start circling. This is their

moment. This is where they come into their own, for there's money in hope: the more desperate the hope, the richer the pickings.

(Dawkins, in Diamond, 2001, p.xiv)

Wherever there is a vague illness, capitalism follows closely behind, and there exists a world of experimental treatments for ME where private treatments of unclear or dubious efficacy flourish. One that is quite prominent and works more on the mental illness model is 'Reverse Therapy', and this is an expensive and controversial therapy, costing many hundreds of pounds. The following is a statement on the Reverse Therapy website (the marketing of the treatment employs as much medical language as possible, yet anyone can become a *Reverse Therapist*):

...emotions and brain processes interact with the Hypothalamus-Pituitary-Adrenal glands (the 'HPA Axis') that trigger changes to the Sympathetic Nervous System and the Immune System.

(Eaton, 2010, n.p.)

In other words, Reverse Therapy claims to offer a 'cure' by showing sufferers a way to 're-program' themselves. It works on the assumption that sufferers have been dwelling inside the illness until it has become their only modus operandi and identity. The sufferer gets caught in an 'illness loop' and not a 'wellness loop'.

7) CFS-ME in popular culture or *Suki, go to the well*

My heart is sinking.

I am watching influential comedian Ricky Gervais on his “Fame” tour DVD (Gervais, Fame, 2007), unaware that he is about to help reinforce the prejudice that ME sufferers have spent the last twenty years attempting to eradicate, not just in the UK, but globally. In his ‘*Suki, go to the well*’ sketch, Gervais sets up a scenario to demonstrate that “you never hear a starving African complaining about having ME”¹³

This is a clunky sketch with a comedian I normally find funny, but in the skit, when Suki’s father asks her why she cannot go to the well, several miles away, ‘Suki’ shrugs her shoulders and she simply states “ME”, losing her African accent having adopted the stereotype of a British benefit fraudster. Everyone laughs. At the time of writing, this feels like the cultural meme hinted at on Twitter or Facebook with the hashtag as “*#firstworldproblems*”. Gervais infers here is that ME is a problem of a delicate western bourgeois culture, or a ‘nanny state’: that if it were in the ‘real world’ such as Africa, sufferers would somehow ‘get over themselves’.

I found this sketch hard to take when this illness has deeply retarded my life. It can prevent me from playing with my son or walking to the bus stop, or remembering essential words, and puts pressure on my family and friendships. And I’m one of the lucky ones who is not a ‘25-percenter’, where life is reduced permanently to a bed. For

¹³ In fairness, Gervais also says in his intro to the joke that “ME is a real physical illness” or words to that effect, which serves to allow him the right to lampoon the condition in the skit.

some ME sufferers, suicide has eventually been their only release from daily suffering.

I wonder if the Gervais sketch presents a common view of CFS-ME in today's UK?

Ultimately, I realise I am part of a phenomenon that the wider society finds it difficult to deal with.

8) CFS-ME and thinking oneself well

The culture around sufferers often implies they have made themselves ill. Expensive treatments such as *Reverse Therapy* use techniques borrowed from the advertising industry. They first make people feel that they are 'wrong' or somehow inferior, and then sell them the solution. Meanwhile, in the NHS, anecdotal evidence suggests that many UK physicians still see CFS-ME as a mental illness (and this has been my personal experience). Frequently sufferers are diagnosed as depressed, the irony being that sufferers usually *are* depressed on some level, but often (in my experience) as a secondary symptom of either not being believed, or being snowed-under by the condition, or both.

The core problem with some of these attitudes and inappropriate treatments, is that it is assumed that the patients themselves have 'thought themselves into a state' and are assumed to be able to 'think' themselves out of it, or exercise themselves out of it: a view which would be seen as *highly* inappropriate with desperately ill cancer or HIV+ patients. The reasoning seems to be that CFS-ME is not as 'serious' as these conditions, an opinion rife within some of the medical community, which in turn filters through to popular culture, from dramas to stand-up comedians.

Nevertheless, if we return to the *Reverse Therapy* website, there are phrases that I find interesting. In a kinder context, they could potentially link to my own personal intervention into my illness. But if I were being totally neutral, I would say this state of being in an “illness loop” is common to many chronic illnesses. It is certainly not unique to my illness. Reverse Therapy charges the CFS-ME sufferer (a large fee, typically £40-£70 per hour over several sessions) to teach him or herself how to get out of this negative cycle, and it loudly offers the successful sufferer a ‘cure’ using that actual word *cure* on it’s website, a move similar to evangelical ministries in the USA.

This is no accident. ‘Faith’ is a big part of these treatments. Instead of the word *cure*, a ‘coping mechanism’ is perhaps a more realistic description of what a ‘wellness loop’ can be. That’s why I ended up making my own, free interventions. While it may not be as profitable as a dubiously heralded ‘cure’, any intervention that enhances the quality of life of someone with a chronic illness is worth exploring, particularly if it is freely available. My own project is one such attempt to regain this sense of wellbeing.

Chapter 3: Artists in Extremis

Cultural Methodologies of Extreme Limitations

1. George Perec's *A Void*
2. *Prisoner's Inventions*
3. The Ayrshire Lion Tamer
4. Three Artists in Extremis; Cancer, Sickle Cell Anemia and CFS-ME
5. Jo Spence: Cancer and Phototherapy
6. Donald Rodney: Sickle-Cell Anemia
7. CFS-ME - *The Half-Light Studies of Penny Clare*
8. Other narratives of art making in CFS-ME
9. Usurping the second suffering: How may an artist respond to CFS-ME?
10. Learning with CFS-ME

In this chapter I examine how sufferers of CFS-ME could benefit from a survey of limitations *per se*, both conceptual and practical. By beginning with examples of resourcefulness firstly in literature, then in prison, before turning to artists affected by serious illness and other narratives of art making in CFS-ME, I am also laying the foundations for my experimental approaches.

1. George Perec's *A Void*

The French writer George Perec produced a novel without the letter 'e' titled *A Void* (English edition: Perec, 2008) with the original title being *La Disparition* (Perec, 1989) (literally, "The Disappearance"). The English translation is also an impressive technical exercise, still avoiding the 'e' - but with exacting conceptual prowess despite being a translation. Here's a typical paragraph without an 'e' to be seen:

Haig, a pallid, sickly, timorous boy, an unwitting victim of all that gloom and doom, was psychologically unfit for this cold, harsh world of ours, a world in which, if you want to function, you simply cannot show any pity. Gradually coming to know his son, snapping out of his nihilistic sloth at long last, disparaging his past duplicity, his misconduct, his casual abandoning of his offspring, Augustus finally got down to pray for moral stamina, so that no guilt, no stigma, should attach to his son for a sin that was his — which is to say, his own — and nobody's but his.

(Perec, G, *A Void*, 2008, p.135)

In a subsequent work, Perec effectively took all these unused 'e's and built a kind of 'reverse' text around them in which the 'e' is the *only* vowel employed. Titled *Les Revenentes* (Perec, 1991) (sic – *The Returned*), Perec's work here is equally idiosyncratic and has a playful sense of adaptation towards a very strict rule.

2. Prisoner's Inventions

In 2003, Chicago-based artist collective Temporary Services published *Prisoner's Inventions* (Angelo and Score, 2003) authored by the prisoner known only as 'Angelo'. The book was an anthology of creative responses to restricted materials in prison. Angelo makes home furnishings (pp.6-20), recreational aids (pp.82-88), even a kettle ('stinger' p.35) and dozens more inventions out of papier-mache, plastic bags and paperclips. There's a tattooing machine (p.96) made from a Walkman cassette motor attached to a biro and a sharpened strand of paperclip wire. Further examples include a loudspeaker made out of an empty tobacco tin (p.115), an earphone (p.114) and there's a worktable (p.14) made out of an inmate's mattress. Some of these inventions are purely functional, but then there's also the idiosyncratic; a 'spider house' (p.111), where Angelo has made a kind of dolls house for spiders, complete with en-suite graveyard for spiders that have passed away.

Prisoner's Inventions is much more than a publication. Temporary Services have expanded the work with Angelo to include gallery installations (exhibited in Greece, Germany, Spain, the UK and several times in the USA¹⁴). These installations feature

¹⁴ http://www.temporaryservices.org/pi_overview.html

actual mock-ups of the inventions, additional videos of how the methods are created from minimal means – and finally, there is usually one large mock-up of Angelo’s cell, resembling a kind of claustrophobic film-set. Reading areas are set aside which feature expository information on the works and critical responses to it, one of which *The Cell Block and The White Cube* by Jennifer Schmidt (Schmidt et al, 2001), expands on the project in a non-judgmental manner, speaking of the ‘survival’ aspect of Angelo’s book:

Angelo’s drawings illustrate inventions in situations where resources are limited and time is immeasurable. The reader can reflect on the system of incarceration and what that necessitates, while recognizing the inherent relevance of the object as it pertains to an actual person’s experience. Serving as a starting point for investigation and inquiry into the penal system, “Prisoners’ Inventions” also addresses issues concerning the role of expression and freedom of speech...

[Angelo] clearly likes that his creative work is finding an audience, but as long as he is incarcerated, he just wants to “stay sane” while serving his time. He’s not interested in becoming a celebrity prisoner. Perhaps his work on this project will be personally helpful to him later in life if he gets paroled, but for now, the public dispersal of his work seems to be reward enough.

(Schmidt et al, 2011, n.p.)

The author also cites the importance of experimental approaches when dealing with the incarceration of individuals, and whilst there is a marked difference between criminality and those house bound by CFS-ME, there is a useful caveat:

...it seems that we can afford to be a little more experimental in what some prisoners are able to do during their sentences. We can afford to rethink what they might contribute to society while they are still in prison. We can afford to keep thinking about how prisoners might be able to re-integrate into society upon release.

(ibid)

3. The Ayrshire Lion Tamer

Having ME may force the sufferer to mine previously unseen cultural riches of an immediate environment as a primary resource. Given that sufferers have to make do with what is at hand whether they like their environment or not, this can throw up what our American friends would call 'a curveball'. At Christmas, as a family, we invited everyone on the street round for wine and mince pies. To our surprise, nearly everyone turned up. One of our guests, we found out that day, used to be a lion-tamer. Not an everyday occurrence in suburbia, but one in which has inspired me to dig below the surface of any so-called 'average' street and become a kind of anthropologist or artist at home.

4. Three Artists in Extremis; Cancer, Sickle Cell Anaemia and ME

Moving away from the street to the body, perhaps one should look very closely at what artists do when assailed by different forms of limitation within chronic illness. I have chosen three artists in this section, all *in extremis*, two of whom were so ill that they died - and one remains alive but bed-bound. All three of these artists adapted their practice to partner their illness along the way. I have, in this section, flagged artists with two other illnesses that have much chronicity (and often grave consequences); Cancer and Sickle-Cell Anaemia. These artist-sufferers had some public recognition. We will then conclude this section by looking at an 'undiscovered' artist who has CFS-ME and who has served as a kind of case study or fieldwork for me. This research project would be the first to profile her work. Locating / identifying artists that have CFS-ME is not easy because broadly speaking, ME sufferers do not have the 'acute/remission' pattern to their illnesses to carry out much work, or fundamentally any laboratory diagnoses. As a result and because they lack the energy to promote themselves, they become 'invisible' artists and patients. And the paradox is that those who are often making interesting work are so ill they can barely lift a camera or hold a brush, let alone leave the house.

So instead of 'remission' these individuals are almost always ill across all aspects of their lives. One can say for ME sufferers that their exhaustion is reliable in its unreliability. So artist-sufferers tend not to be able to have art-shows in places outside of their living spaces or online. Or put another way, they are left only with the process of making art. This is an interesting point, because it implies that there must be *something* in their process that is meaningful when there is little chance of being fit

enough to get the work exhibited, or apply for a grant. One might assume that they are doing it for themselves and that there is an element of self-medicating their condition through art.

Diversity and adaptation are the key themes of the following artists. Their backgrounds and unique (and sometimes existential) circumstances influence the work they produce, made in frequently uncomfortable situations. Sometimes their illness prevented a body of work from expanding. But if one thing unites these artists – it is that they are seriously limited in their health, and moreover, may have had to develop highly economical strategies to produce work at all. This also may allow their work to be very inclusive. To keep a theme, I've chosen photography as the medium here. Firstly, I'd like to turn to a name familiar to some in exploring artists and illness, and in particular, the chronic degenerative illness of cancer with the artist Jo Spence, overleaf.

5. Jo Spence: Cancer and 'Phototherapy'



fig 1. Exiled



fig 2. Industrialisation

Images from *Beyond the Perfect Image Photography, Subjectivity, Antagonism* (Spence, et al 2005) and also the artist's archival site www.jospence.org

British photographer Jo Spence (1934-1992), when diagnosed with breast cancer, began to develop an autobiographical form of camera work that she titled 'phototherapy' – a form of reflective self-portraiture alongside manifestos, text works, and publications, such as her autobiographical mid-period work *Putting Myself in the Picture: A Political, Personal and Photographic Autobiography* (Spence, 1986) a practice which she saw as sanctioning first-person photography not only for herself but for other groups of women.

Aimed at arming herself from the illness that eventually claimed her, it is clear that her practice and naming of this technique 'phototherapy' can be viewed as an artist's intervention. The basis of this work had built on previous experiences within co-counselling and community projects with women's groups. Outside of these facets

of life, Spence had been an accomplished photographer and had worked in the meditative space of the studio before studying photography formally at university, at which point she received both a first class honours degree, but also, around the same time, a cancer diagnosis.

It was the fusion of her photographic background, her previous community work around the health of working class women, alongside documenting the effects of the surgical interventions on her body that subsequently coalesced to form this 'phototherapy'. As well as using it herself, Phototherapy became a practice and philosophy she encouraged others to undertake, often with small compact cameras and with minimal technical complexity. Spence argued that the main hurdle of phototherapy was not technical, it was one of having enough courage to turn the camera on oneself.

Publicly articulating her process in talks and magazines, some of which she co-founded, she spoke of democratising photography in as simple and economical means as possible, (initially from a feminist perspective). One gets the sense that whilst her phototherapy images *are* autobiographical, they seem to be taken and arranged in such a simple and democratic a way that they appear to be deliberately accessible, as if she always had an eye on her idiosyncratic practice being adopted as a model. Her various self-portraits are arresting, even within today's oversaturated image culture. Spence's dramatic photographs of lumpectomy scars, of contorted facial expressions and uncomfortable autobiographical re-enactments of her life appear to reveal a practice of constant confrontation and questioning. This questioning not only examined authority, but specifically tackled illness, of British medical protocols and the

question of who controls and 'owns' one's illness.

For the sick practitioner today who wishes to lean towards such a defiant model, Spence has bequeathed a lasting template that is simple, workable and confrontational. Facing her illness head-on, she saw her art practice as one of survival, not merely as occupational therapy. Spence's studio images, viewed as a body of work, remind me of a form of autobiographical reportage, clearly showing a progressive investigation of an internal war that she chose to externalise, understand and disseminate. I resonate with Spence's work as she emphasised an egalitarian approach whilst maintaining first-person views, and in regard to her illness she merged it with a kind of 'holism'. For Spence, an art practice formed part of a range of approaches to fight cancer, accompanying a journey into Traditional Chinese Medicine alongside other counter-cultural approaches (which in the 1980s were seen as very esoteric in the UK, especially outside of middle-class culture, which is perhaps ironic, because in China, this was 'common-person's medicine'). It is this multi-barrelled approach and breadth of vision that makes Spence's work relevant to this project.

Spence's artistic process was the engine of change when she was facing her biggest obstacles. Her approach was broad and integrative. It touched on manifestos, on 'authoring' one's own illness and attempting to maximise her chances of interrupting the onset of aggressive illness through placing an art practice on an equally important level as medical interventions, which were failing her anyway, and perhaps even defining these practices *as* a kind of medicine.

I find the latter point stirring and inspiring. Spence's work is relevant to this project in the naming and development of a methodology partly directed by the illness. In developing 'phototherapy', although primarily autoethnographic, Spence forged a clear, adoptable methodology as a brave and confrontational process during illness. We know Spence practiced what she preached by continuing the process through all stages of her illness including her final days. Her books outline simple exercises that yield insightful results. She was autoethnographic by stepping in and out of the field via the primary tool of an art practice.¹⁵

¹⁵ Another cancer-based narrative emerges in the autoethnographic work of Ian Breakwell. "In 2004 Breakwell was awarded an AHRC-funded Fellowship at Central St Martins College of Art & Design to explore new ways of presenting his Diary, entitled *The Diary Re-invented*. Later in 2004 he was diagnosed with inoperable lung cancer. The next fourteen months saw a frenetic pace of work, collating forty years of Diary material for future publication and a new audio-visual installation BC/AD [Before Cancer/After Diagnosis], based on his Final Diary. Breakwell died in October 2005; he left instructions for his colleagues to complete his work." Source: http://www.anthonyreynolds.com/breakwell/diary/diaries/decade/the_2000s

6. Donald Rodney: Sickle-Cell Anaemia



Fig 1. In the House of my Father (Rodney, D 1995, Tate.org)

Next, we will examine an autobiographical work about the hereditary disease *Sickle-Cell Anaemia* which, despite medical advances, almost always reduces the lifespan of the sufferer. I'd like to describe a single photograph (above) I remember from *The British Art Show 5*, in the late nineties, which has had a lasting effect on me because of the depth of information one could glean from a simple yet charged singular image set alongside a few lines of text.

Dried animal skin has been used historically to form parchment, and unlike leather it remains porous and more delicate. The thought of using human skin for anything recreational or utilitarian evokes images of Nazi abominations, of skin for lampshades and of deep horrors explored in the book *The Lampshade: A Holocaust Detective Story from Buchenwald to New Orleans* by Mark Jacobson (Jacobson, 2011). The practical use of human skin is therefore, already a deeply loaded idea, one in

which artist Donald Rodney (1961-1998) gracefully usurps, to form an origami-like object sitting in the palm of his hand. Made from his own skin.

When encountering the work, the viewer senses it is an object of some reverence and extremely fragile, but perhaps wouldn't guess it was skin. It appears to be something like a reassembled banknote, rescued from the back pocket of a pair of jeans after a washing machine cycle. And because it is an experience that many people have encountered, (ruining a banknote in the washing), one may assume this was some kind of satirical work about poverty.

As a photographic artwork it works on several levels. At first glance, there is little to see of context and history, but it snares the viewer because it is a beguiling image. Perhaps one would associate it with African-Caribbean culture because of the skin colour of both the hand and what is placed on it. The paper sculpture looks like some kind of shack, and so perhaps this is a piece about origins, maybe poverty, lineages and family. It turns out it *is* about family but for fatalistic and genetic reasons.

On closer inspection, when we examine this large, black, open male palm upon which rests a gossamer-thin object – we see it is a 'paper' house, crudely held together with two tiny pins. It looks as if it would collapse at any moment. There is a doorway visible, neatly cut – perhaps with a scalpel. The image is displayed with an accompanying text nearby such as in the example below. As you read the explanation you become aware that the house is made from human skin, removed neatly from Rodney's body. Here's how the Tate Gallery describes the work:

Donald Rodney's highly personal piece, "In the House of My Father" is dedicated to his father who had died two years earlier. Donald Rodney himself was suffering from sickle-cell anaemia, an inherited disease of the blood, which caused his death in 1998. The photograph comprises his open hand, with a small, papery looking house construction placed in his palm. The house is loosely pinned together with two, enormous pins (nails?) which makes for poignant viewing when we consider the personal history of the artist, the knowledge that the house is actually made of Rodney's skin, and for Christians, the impact of the possible biblical imagery and title.

(Barson, 2014, n.p.)

I reiterate that the house doesn't look like skin. It has blue staining, possibly from the medical removal process. We could term this kind of photograph a 'radial' one, because despite the economy of the image, the title and subsequent back-story of the object 'radiates' out - touching areas such as genetics and hereditary issues, black cultures, and a kind of 'memoriality'. Given that Rodney's father died from the disease as did Rodney himself only a few years after this image was taken, it becomes a charged and considered photograph on illness. His work is useful to this research project because of its depth, simplicity, and whilst it still serves as reminder or signpost for the tragedy of sickle-cell anaemia, it makes an excellent case for photography as a both conceptual and poetic conduit in which to process mortality and loss through extremely economical means.

The work is:

a) Autoethnographic – i.e. the artist is looking at a societal problem in a visually autobiographical way, he is both the field and the researcher. But at no point does this become self-indulgent.

b) It uses metaphor through a body politic line of enquiry and a technical photographic methodology. It is a highly loaded image connoting black history, mortality, evil, care, heritage and hereditary issues. All this within one photograph and as a result it is a sleek and economical work. It could, by itself be the source of a lengthy discourse.

c)...and as a consequence it provides an efficient encapsulation of multiple issues in a single picture making a strong argument for the validity of an artist's response as part of cultural discourse.

7. CFS-ME - The Half-Light Studies of Penny Clare

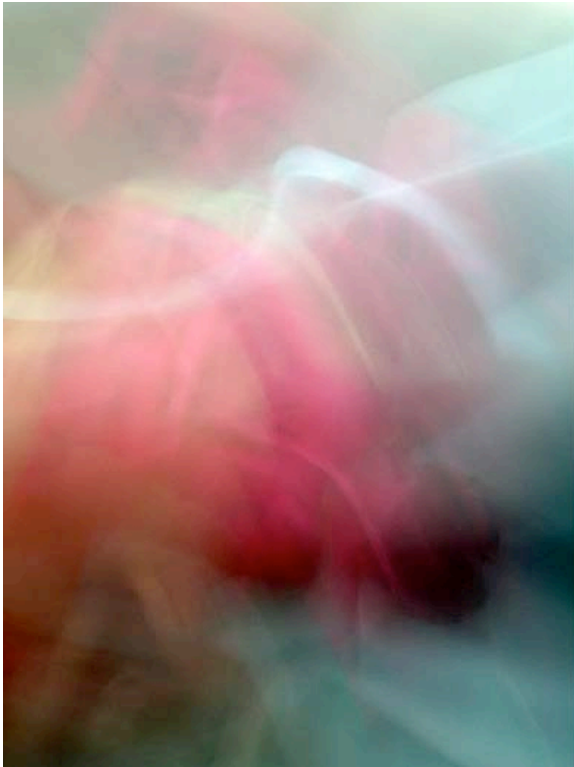


Fig 1. A nebula bursts out of the pillow

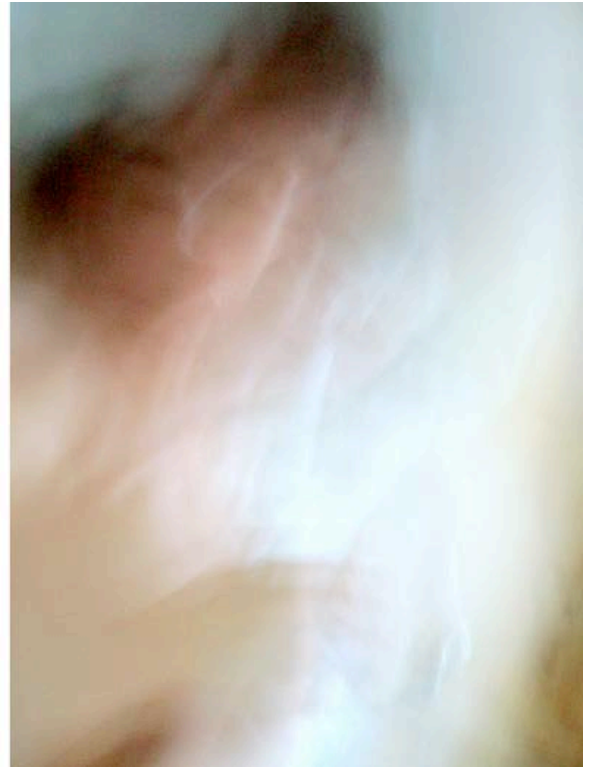


Fig 2. I appear from another realm to comfort myself

(Images sourced from the artist's personal archive)

I once co-edited a self-help newsletter for sufferers of CFS-ME who were interested in adopting meditation practices to help cope with the illness. My co-editor and I would hunt out quotes and articles from other magazines and write pieces ourselves, producing a kind of compilation newsletter that we mailed around the world. We were interested in short-form content, which was easily understood but had some depth to it.

During this time, two things occurred to us that formed a kind of accidental research:

1. Many sufferers with the illness turned to Buddhism or Eastern mysticism.

Why were so many CFS-ME sufferers drawn to these practices? I was a Buddhist, and so was my co-editor and it turned out than many *many* other people with the illness

shared this interest. Was this because people who had exhausted or confounded NHS services in the UK were turning to alternative therapies and practices like Buddhism? I think of Jo Spence here with her interest in traditional Chinese medicine.

2. Another anomaly was the proportion of overtly creative people who the illness had claimed – bucking the ‘careerist’ stereotype of an ME sufferer offered by the media in the 80s - of insensitive city bankers who had burned out from cocaine, excess and greed. Instead, here, I noticed a subtle link between creative sensitivity and sensitivity in general, to light, noise, food, and so on – the illness that became CFS-ME.

It was here I discovered a seriously ill woman who was within the 25%¹⁶ group of sufferers. Her name is Penny Clare.

Penny Clare is a writer and photographer who is mostly confined to her bed by CFS-ME, enduring a continuous and isolated existence. Her art practice is directly informed and intrinsically related to an unarguably dire and unbroken experience as a bed-bound sufferer during the last two decades. All her work emerges from living incapacitated in a darkened room.

Penny Clare and I communicated frequently and I eventually went to visit her. She was surprisingly composed in her small bed and able to talk for a few minutes at a time. After the visit, years passed and our communication became less frequent until I lost contact with her. One day, I heard from her - she had started to take photographs. I had a look. I’d never seen anything like them.

¹⁶ My source here is Shepard and Chaudhuri, 2001 - Action for ME and The ME Association also use this figure.

Clare's art developed firstly by writing poetry, then articles, and then eventually, an autobiography - all accomplished by torchlight or by working in near absolute dark. The artist's photographs were also all taken in this darkened bedroom, without much preparation. In such a dark place an automatic exposure on a small digital camera can easily take up to ten seconds. Although this wasn't the artist's intention in the first instance, Clare grew to find a sense of kinship in both this working method and the aesthetics of the finished images, which were/are very delicate and foggy.

Upon seeing the results, she continued to take photographs in this way, using her strongest but unsteady arm as a kind of monopod, her wobbling weak arms causing much blurring of her auto-portraits during the exposure. As a consequence a kind of authentic movement, or physicality of her illness is traced on the camera's sensor. This 'wobble' literally becomes a signature. When I saw the images for the first time - which were mainly the self-portraits I describe, taken with this shaky limb over several seconds, I said to Penny "these are like life-studies, but of your 'half-life'" – I asked her if she agreed that these images might be termed '*half-life studies*'. She didn't, she saw the imagery as emergent and promising, of light arising from the darkness - and preferred *half-light* studies as the methodological term.

The vast majority of the photos are shot with little artificial or natural daylight, although daylight is occasionally gleaned from a small opening or a crack between the curtains. The artist's illness has made her eyes very sensitive to light, directly impacting and informing both her process and outcome. Over time, Clare has started to perceive different nuances and subtleties of light depending on the time of day, the season, local weather and so on. Despite having endured such a long incarceration in the

room, she told me that this awareness of life, through her work creates a paradox, that despite being physically contained by the condition she feels as if she is still integrated with the universe (she told me “I feel like I’m on the *Starship Enterprise*, I’m travelling at warp-speed through the universe but the view out the window is always the same” (Clare/Dooks, 2011, Field-notes).

Like Jo Spence, although her method is very different, no attempt is made in her images to ‘prettify’ her experience or personal appearance, or her room, for the benefit of the camera. In this way, the images straddle an interesting space between fine art photography and a kind of auto-photojournalism. And again, it is kind of a ‘collaboration’ with the limits of the illness. The illness here is an editor - by limiting choice. The images genuinely expose the artist and her room in all senses of the word, and once taken, are not altered aside from using basic online techniques of cloud photo storage, mainly the adjustment of brightness and contrast.

In preparing this document I spoke to Clare about memorable or significant experiences during these last 20 years. She spoke about one day in particular. Fortuitous circumstances came together so that on that particular day the light shone in her bedroom as usual, from the tiny gap in the curtains. But without realising it, she noticed that the room had become a camera-obscura. Images of the outside world were suddenly projected on her wall, upside down and back to front; cars, people, trees, children playing and so on. To me, it seems conceptually fitting that the outside world appears upside down and back to front. This was her view of the world, scrambled and fractured, with shifting perspectives and surreal views of reality. The people outside were like ghosts to her now, the traffic moved across the wall and the

whole scene was projected around her, like a thought bubble, with people arriving and departing as phantasms. She said she was never able to recreate it again.

I think of her being 'inside' a camera when she tells me this and because of the long, wobbly exposures, the images themselves feel viscerally fused with her.

In 2011, Clare's images very nearly made it to a major public exhibition, but in an experience common to artists with exhaustion-related illnesses, she could not complete both the work and application process, and as a result only a few online examples are available (Clare, 2013, n.p.). If the art-world helped Penny Clare put these images together for a publication or such an exhibition, it would be one of the most authentic visual essays of CFS-ME ever produced. But for now, Clare remains for me an inventive and visually articulate artist, working in and attempting to explode the slough of her everyday life.

8. Other narratives of art making in CFS-ME

A relevant academic paper about creative responses to CFS-ME is one aimed (in part), at art therapists working with clients with CFS-ME published in 2006 titled *Narratives of art-making in Chronic Fatigue Syndrome / Myalgic Encephalomyelitis: three case studies* (Reynolds, & Vivat 2003). In it, the authors map the terrain of an 'occupational' view of art practice from sufferers who wouldn't describe themselves as professional artists.

Firstly, the abstract outlines the exploration of the narratives of three women who had lived with the illness for many years, and who engaged in art-making as a leisure activity rather than for psychotherapy or professional reasons.

“Sharon” took only limited pleasure in her artwork. For her, it stood as a testament to a path *not* taken, since it reminded her of all the alternative activities that had been closed to her since the onset of ME:

‘I sometimes look around at all these things (textile items) I’ve got and so many years ill health and it’s not something I probably would ever have done if I hadn’t been ill, because I’d much rather be more active ... I wouldn’t say it reminds me of failure, but it does remind me of the fact that I was unable to do anything myself...They remind me of bad times rather than good’.

(Reynolds & Vivat, 2006, p.11¹⁷)

“Julia” continued with the theme of metaphorical movement through the illness experience, using the image of a door opening:

‘It (art-making) has made a difference to my life. It was as though someone, the door was ajar and suddenly someone flung it open and said ‘this is it’ ... that’s the way forward... I’ve got something else to turn to, rather than just looking at the things that I can’t do’.

(ibid, p.15)

¹⁷ My page numbers are from a pdf emailed to me from the author and may differ from other versions available in print or online. The text is identical.

“Grace” also showed another painting that was rich in symbolism, expressing her feelings of isolation and abandonment.

‘I think the one that expressed my feelings when I was at rock bottom is the one [painting] with the black on the left, with the cross ...There’s a lot of little figures clinging onto it and I think that was at my lowest point of despair really. There’s the world on the right hand side and it’s got a little solar system and how I felt was that I was completely outside of the world and even outside of the Solar System in this sort of black nothingness...It took me back, it made me realize how much better I do feel now, you know. More connected even though I am really still very isolated’.

(ibid, p.18)

The authors conclude in part, thus:

Art therapists who work with individuals who have lived with CFS-ME for many years probably should not assume that art-making can be a curative experience. Rather, as Ferris & Stein (2002, p.47) suggest, art-making may be better regarded as helping those who live with serious illness to ‘unfold the cramped self, uncover losses and strengths, and gain the courage to begin a process of reclamation of story and life’. Further research is required into the meanings of leisure-based and therapeutic art-making for people living with CFS-ME to guide sensitive therapeutic practice.

(ibid, p.25)

In the first case “Sharon” seems neutral about such benefits, even negative about the effect her art practice has on her. She is able to look at the objects she has created as a kind of diary within which she can trace the weight of the illness over the passing years. “Julia” sees art as a kind of door to directly help her, as if resources she didn’t see before are somehow revealed. She is enthusiastic / evangelical about the revelation. But in the case of “Grace” we have a similar kind of insight from her modest art projects; she is able to reflect on the projects and link them to her emotional life. Like Julia, the resulting insight is a little dark and hopeless at times: “...More connected even though I am really still very isolated” (ibid, p.18)

The key point about the route I have taken which is, to an extent in common with these women, is that art may not cure ME, but involvement in a reflective art practice may improve the capacity to cope. It does not stop the illness but it may improve one’s relationship to it. None of Reynolds & Vivat’s case studies saw their participation in art making as a negative process, with the possible exception of Sharon who seemed generally overwhelmed by the illness.

9. Usurping the second suffering: How may an artist respond to CFS-ME?

In this section, I outline and question what practices which may lead to research methodologies are sympathetic to the illness, before I outline my own initial responses to it, and end with a personal account of some of the obstacles one has with learning with CFS-ME.

The 'Second Dart'

In the introduction (p.2), the research question was presented thus:

Q: If three idiosyncratic contemporary art projects were developed by an averagely affected sufferer of CFS-ME, across three different, even divergent subject areas, what shape would such projects need to take in order to foster the practitioner with a more satisfyingly engaged existence?

In Chapter 2 (Section 6), despite taking issue with *Reverse Therapy*, I suggested that perhaps there is some value in the idea that sufferers could be 're-calibrated' somewhat, regarding at least how one *reacts* to an illnesses, especially if the illnesses cannot be eradicated. My background in Buddhist practice reminded me of 'the second arrow of suffering' or the 'second dart' parable from the *Sallatha Sutta*:

When an untaught worldling is touched by a painful (bodily) feeling, he worries and grieves, he laments, beats his breast, weeps and is distraught. He thus experiences two kinds of feelings, a bodily and a

mental feeling. It is as if a man were pierced by a dart and, following the first piercing, he is hit by a second dart. So that person will experience feelings caused by two darts. It is similar with an untaught worldling: when touched by a painful (bodily) feeling, he worries and grieves, he laments, beats his breast, weeps and is distraught. So he experiences two kinds of feeling: a bodily and a mental feeling.

(Feniger, 1998¹⁸)

(Repetition of phrase is typical of many Buddhist texts)

The parable suggests that some suffering is avoidable, that there need not be a 'second dart': i.e. here, there is an element of my suffering I have some control over. In terms of my Buddhist practice, I had strayed from the path somewhat, far from a formal Buddhist life. But I comforted myself with the fact I have never missed a day without my *other* daily practice, that of art, creating something, even if for only a few minutes. Perhaps there were teachings in this side of my life that helped me avoid this 'second dart.' I do have an obsessive art practice that has led to reviews of myself as being somewhat hypocritical – such as in the following example from *The Wire* in 2013 from Clive Bell: "*The irony is that someone describing himself as an exhausted artist should still be producing so much*" (Bell, 2013 – talking about this research project).

As I continued with my daily art practice of small, 'do-able' projects, whether funded or not, a kind of practical philosophy seemed to slowly materialise through practice-led methods; photographic, musical and audiovisual fragments of life I

¹⁸ There is a difficulty in academically citing Buddhist authors of certain traditions, I have used the author's birth name here, before ordination. This is not out of disrespect for the author in regard to his ordained name, more because in academic referencing there is a requirement for a first and second name. If I used the 'dhamma' or Buddhist name here, it would lead to confusion – because the names reflect the lineage and tradition rather than the individual person and make identifying the individual person difficult.

continually made since I was a young man. I was also attempting to 're-imagine' the space around me in a way I had done before the research project (in online projects such as *Polyfaith* (Dooks, 2004), *Surreal Steyning* (Dooks, 2009) and *Select Avocados* (Dooks, 2008).) At the time, when I was concocting some of these early experiments, (such as reinterpreting street names, bus routes and other nearby resources) I had no idea I was researching at all. But as it happened, I was building up an arsenal of 'coping strategies' through an art practice. I'd authored these projects under the limits of CFS-ME initially in order to simply leave the house.

Short, Sensory and Resourceful

I'd given up on large-scale films since being ill. And at first I didn't consciously realise I was working on these 're-calibrations' that needed to touch on the full stratum of my life. I felt I had drifted into a sensory art practice. In retrospect, there was a logical process. Over ten years I made perhaps thirty or forty art projects during this period of my life which were all projects that were:

1. Short
2. Sensory based
3. Resourceful, in the sense of making them about whatever was 'to hand'

I discovered I was accidentally using the toolkits of conceptual art practices like *psychogeography* to expand on other ways of enjoying my living space and the street I lived on, and *re-appropriation* – like Duchamp's upturned urinal. I wasn't even aware

of the word 'psychogeography' until London arts collective *Furtherfield.org* commissioned me to make a short video exploring my ideas around this time. They said one of my projects '*The Erica Tetralix Polyfaith Map of Edinburgh*' (Dooks, 2004) was classic psychogeography. I had to look up the term.

Alongside this, I would assign objects as art that would enable me to 'author' such works crucially *without physical effort*. A special effort was made to 'learn by the senses', as 'brain-fog' often prevented that critical acuity essential to working in broadcast television – but television work did leave me at least, with a wide skill-set which would serve me well during illness.

Three Responses - A Triage, A Portal and An Enhancer

Music making. Sound Art. Photography, all pursued in tiny bursts. Works completed within one hour. BBC Radio Three played some of my low-energy musical interventions. The (then) Scottish Arts Council funded some of my psychogeographical interventions and reviewed them very positively.

In 2010 I continued to formally refine these ideas into the start of a doctorate, by concentrating the practice down to three very different, 'do-able' projects under a unified banner. The idea that these three projects may reside in *different enough parts of my psyche* became the art-hypothesis, which eventually became three vinyl records in primary colours. These were three projects that I felt would make me feel a little

more engaged with my life and life outside my body and mind, without making me desperately ill. This process evolved to become the ‘triangulation’ of the records.

As I outlined in Chapter 1, I discovered that *three* was, for me, the minimum number of themes or projects that improved wellbeing across just enough of one’s ill life to make a substantial contribution to it. I gave myself three meaningful assignments. What I was trying to foster was a good combination of breadth and depth: a kind of self initiated art foundation course, aimed at, but not exclusively for, sufferers of CFS-ME with myself as my own ‘embodied’ case-study.

Instead of using the headings of mind / body / soul (terms prevalent in holistic health care), I decided to author my own version of headings:

1. Art as ‘Immediate Triage’
2. Art as ‘Cosmological Portal’
3. Art as ‘Perceptual Enhancer and Appropriator’

In other words, I felt, firstly I should attempt to address the needs of a painful and exhausted body (‘Triage’) and make peace with the lack of societal contact and instead explore the stars and the origin of life (‘Cosmological Portal’) then before finally attempting to improve everyday life by re-reading and re-imaging one’s surroundings (‘Perceptual Enhancing’).

These approaches translated directly into three LP records, made on vinyl under each heading:

1. Art as Immediate 'Triage' became the LP *The Eskdalemuir Harmonium*

(Dooks and Zuydervelt, 2011): The art practice [literally] as a medicine. Sick artist makes pilgrimages to visit, record and reflect on a decaying Harmonium in the Scottish Borders. It is 'triage' in a slightly dramatized sense. The (harmonium) machine makes noises that calm the nervous system through my physical engagement with it. I also become emotionally attuned to it - but at the same time, these noises it makes are symptoms of decay. I wanted to learn from this. 'Triage' is borrowed medical term¹⁹, identifying how to prioritise someone dying in an ER, or how a baby is born. Here, my use of triage is more to infer that this art practice gives me immediate physical benefits and generates a kind of reciprocal care between the broken instrument and myself.

2. Art as 'Cosmological Portal' became the LP 300 SQUARE MILES OF

UPWARDS (Dooks, 2012): Sick artist realises that a great deal of society is out of bounds for the ill. Why not bypass society altogether and use this isolation as a basis for investigating the universe? This LP was inspired by how close I live to Galloway Forest Park Dark Sky Park, one of the darkest places in the UK. I was also doing a lot of daytime astronomy by looking at the sun with cheap astronomy tin-film. This is primarily a spoken word LP.

¹⁹ <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/triage> "a: the sorting of and allocation of treatment to patients and especially battle and disaster victims according to a system of priorities designed to maximize the number of survivors b: the sorting of patients (as in an emergency room) according to the urgency of their need for care"

3. Art as 'Perceptual Enhancer and Appropriator' became the LP *CIGA{R}LES* (Dooks, 2014): Sick artist investigates how to bring the outside world into the room of the incarcerated by using a field recorder on a windowsill, recording eight hour sessions from it (plus other experiments). These included travelling to the south of France to record a mating season of loud insects, cicadas, but crucially, from one location. This LP investigates a diverse palette of sounds from one place, whether it is on the windowsills of my house, or sat outside a café bar, surrounded by insects.

These LPs have turned into collectors' editions, very expensive bespoke items, with coloured vinyl, luxury printing stock and full colour imagery alongside the vinyl fetishist's *pièce de résistance* – detailed sleevenotes. Add to this that ten editions were made in a bespoke wooden cabinet, laser-cut in San Francisco and shipped to my studio in Ayr. Ultimately, they have become interventions aimed to create a highly individualistic form of holism. Often, the word holism is employed by health care professionals (as well as bogus ones), or found in socio-anthropological contexts – or debated as to whether it even exists at all. I expand on this in Chapters 6 (holism) and 7 (idioholism). For the sake of argument, I'm simply concerned with efficacy within the context of artist-as-healer. I developed the term *idioholism* to provide a banner for these three records that I have termed *The Idioholism Vinyl Trilogy*.

10. Learning with CFS-ME

Learning anything with CFS-ME is very difficult, and as a result, the skill-set that practitioners use for their 'own triage' is almost 'locked' at the inception of the illness. Skills can also disintegrate or become distorted or compromised by the illness. But because enquiry through practice-led arts may use intuition and bypass traditional pedagogies, learning and 'growth' of an artist may remain intact during illness. And by 'artist' I mean to be as inclusive as possible. I mean any curious person with an aesthetic interest in any media. This was my entry point into learning via the senses, in short bursts.

If reading, remembering and recalling are compromised, there is, in fact, no other methodology available but to pursue sensory methods. This contributes to the final objects of this research project being primarily aesthetically driven, and the process has been driven by the senses. Nevertheless, when moments of mental clarity have occurred, I've tried to unpick the process, but aesthetic play and dozy curiosity have been my teachers. With this kind of practice, art isn't something just to occupy the mind; it has taught me how to develop a different kind of mind - one where the intellect isn't exactly put on hold, more given a place to rest for a while. But I would postulate that learning and growth of the practitioner is still possible outside of a purely theoretical framework. Therefore, it seems logical to use the arts to feel engaged with life when the lifeblood of the intellect is interrupted or retarded by illness.

Chapter 4:

Bricolage and The Fragmented Filmmaker

1. *The Fragmented Filmmaker: my story*
2. When the filmmaker falls apart, his films fall apart too
3. Defining bricolage
4. Bricolage and autoethnography
5. The fractured film
6. Benefits of cross-disciplinary practices
7. A larger cultural overview of bricolage
 - 7a. Montage and collage
 - 7b. Film production and bricolage
 - 7c. Bricolage in music
 - 7d. Musique Concrete
 - 7e. Hip Hop
8. Bricolage as a methodology for the exhausted artist
9. Conclusion

Introduction

Bricolage:

A work of art or construction put together from whatever materials are available.

(Kirkpatrick, E. And Schwarz, C., Chambers Dictionary, 2011, p.190)

As with such definitions, *bricolage* is best explored by context. This chapter will focus on the roots of bricolage, beginning with a personal view, before expanding on how widely the practice infiltrates contemporary cultural works. As the dominant methodology of the LP trilogy, it serves to discuss bricolage in some depth. I will end by contextualising how bricolage may be an apt methodology for ‘the exhausted artist’.

1. *The Fragmented Filmmaker: My story*

In 1997 I directed my first (and currently only) UK-wide television programme prepared for Melvyn Bragg’s *South Bank Show* series, the longest running arts programme in the world. It was a short fifteen-minute piece, but it was a significant step into the world of broadcast television. Around the same time, I was awarded around £30,000 to make my own experimental film piece (*No One Sees Black*²⁰, Dooks, 1997) funded by the National Lottery, British Screen and the (then) Scottish Film Council. This was very different to the documentary I made for Bragg that had featured

²⁰ Archived online at - <https://vimeo.com/33508442>

the sound artist *Scanner* (Scanner, Dooks, 1997). *No One Sees Black* was one of only a few funded anti-narrative works that the Scottish Film Council was involved in. In *No One Sees Black*, a beaten-up man wanders through a dystopian environment where a newly born lamb is dying in a field (which really happened on the shoot) and two children are fighting in the background. A ten year-old girl is dancing in a bright green school uniform (made from silk) counterpointed by shots of a worm struggling to survive in a patch of moss. When I look at this film now, it feels retrospectively prophetic and existential regarding my health. It is based on dreams and whims. It has no discernable plot. More importantly, it was made in fairly disjointed sections and is cemented by an intense soundtrack over seven minutes.

My methodology around 1997, the time of my 'big break' in film and TV (or 'false dawn' as I later referred to it) was to think of a broad theme and sketch out impulses in my head, rarely writing anything down. In general, I took on all the roles: I wrote, shot and composed nearly everything I made. Doing everything myself meant I had no choice but to work in tiny, modular sections so as not to become overwhelmed by the project, even when my health was good. It is ironic now that I am ill, that I *still* choose to do everything as much as possible in a creative project. However, that may be because I have practiced sensory-methods so long, and in such tight timeframes and modules that the method has become second nature, (and specific to me). Furthermore, my methods have been refined and tightened as my health declined.

In *No One Sees Black*, without a script, I built up an impulse-driven palette of images and sounds. Fragments of colour, swatches of blur and texture and a sense of

seizing the moment were gathered under a loose filmic theme of trying to articulate the last thoughts of a dying person. I would find out much later that my particular method could be described as a kind of *bricolage*. Eventually, these elements would have to join together to become a film. Such spontaneity feels very good on the shoot, but at some point, it means that the film has to be 'made' in the edit suite. The key point is that the aforementioned film was made in controlled bursts of activity but it was really forged in the edit, perhaps because as film critic Roger Ebert points out: "it is said that editing is the soul of the cinema" (Ebert, 2004, n.p.). For me the edit was the deferred place where I accounted for my spur of the moment methods and where the 'deferred' aspect of work now had to take place, but in surroundings compatible with CFS-ME.

Most of the learning and practice that led up to *The South Bank Show* and *No One Sees Black* has not come from the written word. It has come from an obsession with sensory methods. Even when I briefly made television programmes I had already found a way of working in a short, piecemeal manner in order to make something hopefully larger than the sum of its parts. In early 1998, I waited for the next 'stellar' commission to roll in. It never did. My bright start in broadcast TV and art-cinema crashed to the ground, as I occasionally did.

The first time I realised I couldn't do something I felt surprise.

It came as an insult, an affirmation of my limited existence.

(*Illness*, Carel, 2009, p.1)

The next 'stellar' commission could wait, and in 1998 it had to; I became seriously ill while working in California. I had food poisoning and a virus that overwhelmed me in an unusually aggressive manner.

The first six months of activity with CFS-ME are key to how the illness plays out in the rest of the patient's life (or so I was told by the support group I had joined after my official diagnosis in Edinburgh in 2000). My first six months didn't involve proper rest. I was due to work in a Californian desert completing a short film for the US Public Broadcasting Service (P.B.S.) but when I eventually dragged myself to the locations, a day of work would result in me becoming housebound for increasingly prolonged periods. Local doctors and hospitals said I had nervous exhaustion. Eventually I had to leave the world of television, and I went into teaching, which I loved. For about six months my symptoms were fairly manageable, but then I became much worse. The exhaustion became permanent and other symptoms began to arise alongside it such as stomach pains and muscular cramps and the other symptoms I outlined in Chapter 2. My life follows this pattern to this day.

The next phase of my life revolved around dispensing with crews altogether and my beginning to have dalliances with electronic art. That home computers became affordable and powerful was also fortuitous. I was happy with describing my newly adjusted work as being lens-based media or even new media. I was lucky, in that even during the darkest of days, I could just about fill in applications to fund projects, so occasional assignments still came along and some were high-profile and satisfying, if not 'stellar'. I was one of Art Council England's "Year of The Artist" recipients in

2000/2001, being an artist in residence with the BBC and their film archive in the North of England. Here, I could make films *sitting down*. I needed to *lie* down, but I could squeeze an hour a day for the residency. I learned to use time very efficiently during an editing session before the inevitable mental fog and physical fatigue forced me away from my work. I began to place mattresses very near my work places.

Despite these obstacles, the *Year of The Artist* residency resulted in publications (*To Look North* CD+CD Rom: Dooks, 2001) and related commissions. That gave me a sense of being 'in' society. I felt 'verified' as a person despite my failing health. Despite these successes, I was still changing my lifestyle radically and after major projects I often felt worse for a considerable time, often months. Moreover, projects had to be completed in very particular circumstances, i.e., to my health-specifications. If I gave a lecture, at a film festival for example, I had to pre-record the lecture in case I collapsed on the day.

My 'career' in film and television never happened, but I comforted myself with the thought that the techniques that got me noticed in the first place were perhaps the techniques that could still be employed in the next chapter of my life. I didn't realise that these 'bricolage' techniques would be used to help me navigate my own illness.

2. When the filmmaker falls apart, His Films Fall Apart Too

Illness induces adaptation and that adversity is the source of creative responses to it... (Carel, 2009, p.16)

My three vinyl LPs and this research project have challenged the assumption that somehow I ‘stopped’ being a film-maker after my TV work and larger commissions ended. I simply used the term ‘artist’ after I had been ‘diagnosed’²¹ in hospital. After I stopped making ‘formal’ films, under my new illness, I composed music projects, created site-specific conceptual art projects, micro-writing projects, photography, video installations and more. It sounds extremely prolific a life but at this time I had both decided to make work over the internet with people whom I had not met physically – and develop an interest in other labour-saving methodologies. I assumed my internal filmmaker was long dead.

From 2009-2014, the work carried out as part of my doctorate lead me to the conclusion that as I had ‘fallen apart’, *my films had ‘fallen apart’ also*. One could say that this project - the LP trilogy, when viewed with the record sleeve artworks, the graphics and the sleevenotes - were ‘fragmented films’ and that I was a ‘fragmented filmmaker’. I *was* still making films, albeit in a sectional and segmented manner. This was quite a revelation to me. Like melting icebergs, the components of my films had drifted away from each other as a result of my psycho-physical condition. But they were still in the same ocean.

²¹ As we have discussed in chapters 1-2, a hospital diagnosis is still controversial – physicians would only state ‘you are chronically fatigued’ – whilst patients want a more fleshed out diagnosis. It is also, as I have hinted previously, a diagnosis of exclusion, where biomarkers within patients are within ‘normal’ tolerances of the body.

When it came to this research project, which started in late 2009, it was no coincidence that I chose to make works as three vinyl records because they could be produced to be analogous to the kinds of films I produced:

1. Each record is a primary colour (as a traditional filmic image was historically constructed from²²).
2. Elements of spoken word and texts are on the vinyl itself in the works (a script, dialogue, narration? My TV documentary work included these)
3. Each record contains music and sound art (original soundtrack? Or perhaps music and foley²³)
4. 12" covers in full colour and photographic essays are inside each record sleeve inside (principal photography?)
5. An emphasis on graphic identity cemented all three records together – perhaps one could argue these may be ‘titles and credits,’ and not just because close attention to typography and design are part of the 1970s ‘concept album’ tradition. The graphic identity helps the audience psychologise a unity of thought, perhaps trusting that the contents will chart a clear trajectory.

Choosing vinyl records as the vehicle for this project became the ideal medium in which an ill filmmaker demonstrates the *un*-fragmenting or re-cohering of a life that had fallen apart.

²² The colour motion picture for most of its life was constructed traditionally from normally dominant colours: red, green and blue and recording each region separately. Although green is not a primary colour there are still three colours that made up most 16mm and 35mm film prints of modern cinema. Since the millennium, this is moving more to digital projection and less uses of traditional film prints.

²³ A sound effects technique for synchronous effects or live effects.
<http://www.filmsound.org/terminology/foley.htm>

3. Defining Bricolage

What is the primary methodology of this project?

How has the overall project been constructed?

In the process of making three records there have been multiple elements at play: the music construction, the photographic essays, the sleeve notes, the principles that underpin it - even these words here – so is there any overriding feature of the methodology? Three vinyl records are produced through several short-form or 'modular' exercises that are eclectic, temporally economical and which make use of highly limited, even opportunistic resources. The central methodology is therefore, one of *bricolage*.

Bricolage springs from the French verb *bricoleur*, which in English translates as "to fiddle or tinker." Because this is quite an open definition, it follows that we find it used in diverse contexts, from architecture to biology to computer programming. In this section, I will further define the term and explore the validity of bricolage as a mode of research. I will examine why it is highly relevant, indeed vital in my case, and I will show that in fact 'bricolage' is an approach to creative thinking and creative practice with a long history, and with much by way of practical examples in film, music and contemporary art.

Bricolage versus Brevity: what bricolage is not

It may be wise to negate something from the outset. An inspiration to work via bricolage may arise from seeing so-called 'minimal' or economical artworks and perhaps thinking that such projects are possible with limited means. Perhaps a sick or busy practitioner may want to adopt bricolage as their *modus operandi* because they've seen something inspiring which is 'short' or 'brief' or which *appears to be* short or brief. And of course, economical cultural works can be very engaging, like Ernest Hemingway's²⁴ six-word story reproduced in full here: *For Sale, Baby Shoes, Never Worn*. The problem with something as brief but meaningful as those six words is that to forge them requires a large amount of both experience and insight to be able to reduce what would have taken others hundreds of words to express, into this distillation.

It is clear that using brevity can have profound potential. Martin Creed's work *Some blu-tack kneaded, rolled into a ball, and depressed against a wall* (Creed, 1993, n.p.) is literally the sculptural equivalent of the title. If that seems too glib a statement there's always a Japanese Koan to choose from: these tiny poetic forms are famed for thunderously deep significance. I've spent many years trying to unpick Hakuin Ekaku's Koan: *Two hands clap and there is a sound. What is the sound of one hand?*

Are 'minimal' works simple to execute? The above examples and their creators may be able to create such resourceful examples because they are experienced practitioners in their fields. What may be more achievable is for sick people to make

²⁴ The story is attributed to Hemmingway, but he died before verifiable sources were ascertained. I still include the 'story' here as the piece works regardless of who authored it.

anything, by bricolage techniques. The key thing in my view, is to engage with a process, rather than worry if one is producing Hemingway-standard results.

Whilst it would be exciting to produce a research project based on a six-word story or a piece of blu-tack pinned to the wall, this is not my methodology. I have produced instead, something which when viewed together is more like a modest compendium or audio visual encyclopaedia of the state of my health and desires. It is composed of small units, but viewed as three LPs and their different methodologies, verges on a labyrinthine enterprise. It's also a kind of accidental diary²⁵ – or literal record(s). And so while such statements like Hemingway's or Ekaku's are significant in emphasising what can be communicated through minimal means, my work is closer to a diary-like process of testing small, discretely connected exercises – in a sense, coping strategies for being ill.

Breadth with as much depth as is possible is my aim. Moreover, the goal of access to a varied life, in my case, through art and music, is a very singular ambition. Whilst that may seem a small ambition, for the chronically ill, it is an emancipating ideal.

²⁵ Again, diaries and their sense of memoriality are common material for those who wish to take some final ownership of their illness. In chapter three *Artists in Extremis* I cited cancer sufferer Ian Breakwell who died in October 2005. But I also cited that "he left instructions for his colleagues to complete his work." A position I am not currently in.

4. Bricolage and Autoethnography

Contextualising bricolage across established cultural disciplines is important when research stems from an '*autoethnographic*' standpoint, (perhaps to counter accusations of 'navel-gazing') so, I will explain the context in which bricolage is used here, which happens to be within the field of autoethnography. Autoethnography was briefly introduced earlier in Chapter 1 as both a celebrated and contested research method; a delicate, reflexive exercise of retrieving 'insider' information. More conventional ethnography might stress more formal experiential distance than a primarily first-person narrative, common to autoethnography.

Reed-Danahay in *Auto/ethnography* (Reed-Danahay, 1997, pp.1-16) suggests that autoethnography has been understood as either the ethnography of one's group or as autobiographical writing that has ethnographic interest. Reed-Danahay also suggests that autoethnography is 'a form of self-narrative that places the self within a social context' – and it is this definition that seems most apt to myself, an *Exhausted Artist*. Through my own experiences I have developed projects designed in the first-person, to gel together ideas of the self, (i.e. myself) within part of that social group or social problem (those who are trying to overcome exhaustion-related illnesses). The motivation for pursuing my modular enterprises has been in order to evaluate my methods and these projects for their potential efficacy, perhaps ultimately outwith myself.

For me, a 'personal bricolage' has arisen out of necessity. A sick artist like myself has to work in bursts 'at home' and use personal insight as the primary source

of research, not just because social interaction and conventional fieldwork is so exhausting. It is more fundamental than that. For example one doesn't *know* the potential emancipatory power of art on CFS-ME (a central purpose of my research) by studying it externally, any more than one *knows* (for example) Buddhism without practicing meditation. Much of the research that has led to this PhD has been a form of autoethnography of my own illness, fused with art interventions practiced in short but reflective bursts. Since I became unwell, I have, by this strict bricolage method, been amassing a body of privileged autobiographically influenced work, which could *not have been constructed from the outside*. The proximity of my life to the research is not only intimate, but essential in my case, because I cannot be removed from my subjective experience.

5. The fractured film

A film-maker, especially a lone film-maker, must have broad experience of the individual components of film; the sound, visual and narrative disciplines, crucial if producing the work alone²⁶. Film is both a unified art in and of itself, but also a 'container' of these individual disciplines. Moreover, these disciplines do not *depend* on film in order to exist as independent arts. They might behave more as a group when working inside a film, but music and performance (to name but two) have longer pedigrees in human civilization.

The fact that film has an interdisciplinary nature was fortuitous. It is because I

²⁶ This is quite a common model now, but less so when I worked in television and when PCs and Apple Macs were less powerful and rarely in the hands of artists. I learned to edit on Umatic, S-VHS suites.

was a filmmaker before I fell ill, that I am now presently working between related constituents of film; photography, music composition, sound art, performance, design - even *psychogeography* (a kind of 'real-life film' - where one may alter the 'narratives' of accepted histories of real spaces by re-appropriating streets and other places). These approaches that I have been working on since 1999 could be termed "M.E.thodologies" – eclectic methods of art practice, specific to CFS-ME

Or to reiterate another way, *when I fell apart, my films fell apart too.*

6. Benefits of cross-disciplinary practices

Because I liked to work across filmic disciplines prior to falling ill, I ended up being reasonably multiskilled – something that has served me well in illness. Cross-disciplinary practices which were initially about me controlling my film-making process, have now become 'accidentally useful' in my life as an 'exhausted artist.' During this change I renamed my job title to a word I authored which was '*Polymash*' – a slightly self-deprecating term that aimed for the lofty heights of a polymath but with clipped wings due to illness. I now work within the fragments of my past film life. Access to my old life is unlikely to rematerialize because of my condition. Traditional film-making requires skills that my illness now chokes. Adaptation is the only way through such a landscape. Bricolage is part of that adaptation because it is sympathetic to many of the (multiple) symptoms of CFS-ME – including that of *impaired cognitive function*.

7. A larger cultural overview of bricolage

Film-making or storytelling require the practitioner to hold a lot of data in the mind at the same time.

In cultural studies, one of the most commonly cited works regarding the use of the word comes from *The Savage Mind* (1962) by Claude-Levi Strauss, a philosopher who sees the *bricoleur* as a kind of anti-craftsman and even something of a maverick:

...in our own time the 'bricoleur' is still someone who works with his hands and uses devious means compared to those of a craftsman
(Levi Strauss, 1962, p.16).

He also warns that art cannot be art if it is constructed entirely from bricolage
"No form of art is, however, worthy of the name if it allows itself to come entirely under the sway of extraneous contingencies... [such as bricolage]" (ibid, p.29)

Macey, in The Penguin Dictionary of Critical Theory entry on bricolage (Macey, 2001, p.52) cites Levi-Strauss's translators as his main source, concluding that the common translation of 'tinkering-about' is the most relevant one. It's understandable that this definition is reached, because as mentioned, *bricolage* springs from the French verb *bricoleur* – to fiddle, to tinker. But we are still referring to the traditional view here to an extent. What of a more open and creative definition?

The sense of improvisation that bricolage carries appeals to the postmodern theorist, since it suggests an arbitrary, undetermined quality to creative activity in which the end is not specified in advance. Where a modern thinker might see lack of order or method, his postmodern counterpart would see a welcome exercise of spontaneity. (Sim, 2005, p.178)

A postmodern view of bricolage, such as the one above may clash in the consciousness of those suspicious of contemporary art, but this is the usual inference regarding the word today. Indeed, the bricoleur as a creative person is part of the art world cognoscenti as opposed to the view when Levi-Strauss's *The Savage Mind* was published. Also, Levi-Strauss's translation (of *bricoleur*) is only relevant in the context of wide contemporary French culture, where bricolage basically means *do it yourself*. I think this is too outmoded a definition and even with Sim's quote above, some clarity is needed to define what bricolage means in cultural forms.

Bricolage has another key characteristic, aside from its 'piecemeal' approach. There is a *resourcefulness* involved in bricolage, perhaps of 'making do' of one's resources not through laziness but through (for example) a poverty of choice and lack of opportunities. An analogy in popular culture would be baking a cake from local ingredients, perhaps with some ingredients missing, and having to adapt, making substitutions. This analogy embraces the 'D.I.Y.' element of bricolage (for example, in the French cultural sense). It is *this* aspect that is highly relevant for transforming health through maximising one's resources whilst constrained by illness. This is the arena of the exhausted artist, faced with a failing physical, social and cognitive fog.

Tiny steps, substitutions, lateral thinking and improvisation are parts of such a methodology of bricolage and are, coincidentally, all qualities needed to manage a chronic illness.

7a. Montage and Collage

Bricolage in the postmodern use of the word, is both expansive and exciting. Artists commonly work in sectional or modular assemblages, some of whom (but not all) borrow images or sounds from popular culture and re-appropriate them. If we look a little deeper we find bricolage linked to two related terms, *montage* and *collage*, cousins of bricolage because they are formed from an assemblage of multiple sources.

Montage is a term associated with film and film editing, and has it's own lineage. Created via editing, a montage can show (for example) the passage of time or geographical movement via a sequence of (short) related shots. A montage can be almost unnoticeable, or deliberately jarring, depending on the director's needs, but it is constructed from multiple fragments, i.e. individual shots. *Collage* is a visual art phenomenon, now a fairly wide and (often digital) practice with artists, where media may be mixed, glued, scanned, borrowed, torn and reassembled onto surfaces, (or photoshopped) – to form a whole. In the book "Collage" (Craig, 2008, p8) Sally O'Reilly writes how the artform of collage has been a kind of prophetic cultural phenomenon:

Collage's rejection of singularity, rationality and coherence is matched and, at times, superseded by mainstream media and culture at large, where channel hopping, surfing, streaming, pieceworking and hot-desking are fast becoming familiar processes.

(O'Reilly in Craig, 2008, p.8)

So it is reasonable to suggest that collage and montage are forms of bricolage, where multiple individual elements create a visual argument or a story.

7b. Film production and bricolage

Movies should be treated as texts – works to be analysed and interpreted. They are similar to any other text, including a textbook. ‘Text’ comes from the Latin ‘Textum’ meaning “that which has been woven.”

Bernard F Dick (Dick, 2009, p.2)

And so we return to filmmaking. Much filmmaking is an interdisciplinary enterprise encompassing dozens of specialised jobs, with most of the practitioners being specialists in their field. The role of the director is literally that, to direct these constituents closer to a whole. The argument that film is therefore a form of (highly organized) *bricolage* would certainly apply to the most obvious model of the fictional or dramatized film, often made with a respectable budget. But even the documentary and the artist’s film is still created in sections and modules – (and potentially still filmed out of sequence) despite being a vastly more minimal enterprise.

In looking at the dramatic fictional film, Steven D Katz in *Film Directing Shot by Shot* states: “...the primary creative positions [in film]– screenwriter, director, cinematographer and editor – divide the individual artist’s vision into component parts...” He states the reasons for this are practical: “The compartmentalization of image, sound, language and continuity fulfils the needs of efficiency, but it is fundamentally different from the way we visualize.” Katz ends the statement with a quandary of whether film is a unified art form or collaborative, modular, ‘collective’ entity: “The question is, whether the expression of this organic, unified experience is a single craft or a combination of individual skills?” (Katz, 2001, p.ix)

Whether or not the director is an auteur, an artist, a documentarian and so on, even the *screening* of a film is a complex assemblage. The medium itself is comprised of many separate individual components; frames with an analogue or digital soundtrack, projector, light, electricity, sound system and so on. Even on video there are digital 'frames' that are strobed to give the illusion of movement and require sophisticated equipment; lasers in DVD and Blu-Ray players, surround sound, gold-plated cables, a screen ratio which is sympathetic to that of the original film – this is the tip of the iceberg in even *playing* a film. Projecting or playing a film or DVD only temporarily 'locks' all of this teamwork and craft together for a given time.

Therefore, film and film-making, on film or video, involves a lot of grouping together of related arts plus technical and aesthetic requirements. The finished article is seen over a period of time, perhaps forming a cohesive narrative, which doesn't by any means exclude the documentary or artist's film. Katz's question as to whether this is a 'single craft' or 'combination of individual skills' doesn't appear to be a mutually exclusive proposition. It seems to me that as a 'single craft' or ensemble creation, film is always comprised of many components. The only things that seem to shift are job descriptions. Derek Jarman made feature films and art directed them, as does Peter Greenaway. John Carpenter writes his own music. The question of who does what does not reduce the idea that film is still a bricolage. As I previously commented, when I have made artists films or documentaries for television I was obsessed with controlling as much as possible, from the typography of the titles, to mixing the soundtrack, to shooting much of my own material. But that doesn't negate the resulting works from being modular enterprises. Some writers and directors are known for being wordsmiths; others are more concerned with the lens. But when a vision is

clear, both may work together. This is the constant ambition of my own practice. The unification of multiple, movable elements. In my practice, whether the work ends up in a digitised video file or on three analogue records, is wholly dependent on locating the apt container for the subject.

I believe when a conventional dramatic film feels implausible and we are forced to leave the womb of the story, a bricolage that was previously lodged in our subconscious now becomes centre-stage. The spell is broken. We realise we are watching a modular construct, of actors, of editing, or plot structure and so on. Unless there is an actual intention to jar the viewer, such as in Eisenstein's editing techniques or Man Ray's film-montages (interestingly both artists had backgrounds in the related art forms of theatre and photography respectively), a bricolage in the conventional and perhaps conservative dramatic film is usually intended to be hidden.

There are many things that could go wrong with a film – continuity errors, technical problems such as bad sound or out of focus shots, bad script – and that's just the dramatic fiction film. To reiterate Katz' comment of a vision being divided into screenwriter, director, cinematographer and editor, a poor application of one of those areas in the film-ensemble will lift the lid off the film and cause it to unravel. Such errors reveal the constituents of the film by accident; the constituents emerge when the stitching comes undone. In my case, *my* stitching came undone and so I now wander through the landscape of those constituent filmic elements, unable to generate the energy required to orchestrate them into a large-scale film work.

One might argue that the components of film are always developing; such biases or emphases of a given 'brick' of this bricolage are moving or fluid, and have a constant relationship with technology, commerce and taste. Taste dictates the weight of individual elements within artforms made by a collective process. One might prefer the visual weight of Tarkovsky's meditative canvas, with very economical (spoken) scripts where the experience is one of minimal idiosyncratic reflection. Or one may prefer the verbal combat of Martin Scorsese's verbally explosive theatrics and razor sharp scripts.

A large-scale dramatic film is composed of actors, scripts, technical crews, art departments, and a multitude of other roles as long as a Hollywood film credits roll, from carpenters to caterers. But a film is more than the sum of its parts if *directed*. Otherwise it is just a group of aggregates with nowhere to go. Likewise in society. We often talk about societal groups or quantifiable phenomena as being "composed of" (implying the *grouping* or movement of constituents, as opposed to 'comprised of' implying a list of constituents). It is also very common, for example, to hear of a political manoeuvre as being "orchestrated by..." implying a need to organise and co-ordinate a complex and shifting set of elements, principles, timeframes and circumstances.

The organisation and direction of sectional aspects of life is fundamental to cultural creations, and also across the various strata of life. The terms 'composed' and 'orchestrated' are beginning to sound quite musical, so perhaps that's where we should examine bricolage next, especially since my work is, at its core, primarily musically and sonically orientated.

7c. Bricolage in music

Bricolage and music is an ever-evolving and self-referencing phenomenon. We could start from several points of reference. We could discuss *fusion* musics (such as jazz fusion), *soundclashes*, *mashups*, *remixes* - even pretty much any form of *multitracked digital recording* which is conceived in small parts, often using loops, and built via bricolage into realised works. In commercially available compositional software such as *Ableton Live*, *Logic Audio* or *Garageband*, even the visual layout of such tools resembles a kind of wall, where sound files and loops are collated and pasted on timelines, forming a song or composition out of a kind of assemblage.

If we look especially to music that has been constructed by limited means, the use of bricolage is an apt and explosive method - and we briefly examine *Hip-Hop* in a moment as a relevant example of this.

I want to contrast Hip Hop with Musique Concrète. I've chosen these two forms because it is extremely easy to clearly locate the bricolage within the sounds of both these sonic arts. Bricolage unites the two, despite differences in social classes, racial groups, different manifestos and vastly different ancestries (not to mention timelines) dividing them. These are not the only forms of music that employ the use of bricolage in their construction, but they are fairly disparate, so it will serve our argument to investigate these particularly distant cousins.

7d. Musique Concrète

In late 1940s France, snippets of field recordings of 'real life' sounds (such as that of factories and traffic) were used as raw compositional material, in small units, that could be subsequently edited together to form a new kind of manipulated sound. The development of this "Musique Concrète" (literally 'concrete music') was facilitated by the emergence of new music technology in post-war Europe. Access to microphones, phonographs and later magnetic tape recorders had become available, at least in research laboratories and broadcast centres: much of the technology had been developed through the war itself. The French composer and theorist Pierre Schaeffer (a telecommunications engineer who moved towards sound work) is credited with originating the term *Musique Concrète*. Schaeffer developed an aesthetic practice that was centred upon the use of recorded sound as a primary compositional resource and emphasised the importance of play (*jeu*) in the creation of music. Pierre Schaeffer's first piece 'written for phonograph' consisted of a short collage of recorded train noises manipulated into an aural montage. Tape loops, pitchshifting and playing sounds in reverse were fundamental to Schaeffer's practice.

Chris Cutler in his 'Plunderphonics' essay (Cutler 2004, in Cox and Warner 2004, pp.143-144) outlines the birth of *Musique Concrète*:

[the mass reproducible flat Berliner disc] fed the growing consumer market for music recordings. ...The breakthrough for the record as a producing (as opposed to reproducing) medium, didn't come until 1948, in the studios of French Radio, with the birth of *Musique Concrète*. The

first concrète pieces, performed at the Concert de Bruits in Paris by engineer/composer Pierre Schaeffer, were made by manipulating gramophone records in real time, employing techniques embedded in their physical form: varying the speed, reversing the direction of spin, making “closed grooves” to create repeated ostinati etc. (p.143) Other composers began to experiment with disc manipulation around the same time, including Tristram Cary in London and Mauricio Kagel in Buenos Aires. ...It is curious that, in spite of the intimacy of record and recording, the first commercially available Musique Concrète on disc was not released until 1956. (ibid, p.144) ...Within two years the radio station, in the face of resistance from Schaeffer, had re-equipped the studio with tape recorders; and Schaeffer, now head of the Groupe de Musique Concrète, continued to develop the same aesthetic of sound organisation and to extend the transformational procedures learned through turntable manipulations with the vastly more flexible resources of magnetic tape.

(ibid, p.143)

Tape then became the mainstay of the ‘electroacoustic studio’; a veritable Aladdin’s cave of tape recorders, alongside existing variable speed record players and mixing desks – these were the exciting new tools, but the record player as instrument was the technological forerunner in Musique Concrète. It was in Schaeffer’s studio that Shellac record players could read a sound normally and in reverse mode, and could change speed at fixed ratios thus permitting octave transposition. This was a means of

further fragmenting and breaking recorded sound apart to widen the sound canvas.

One sound source could become multiple sounds. This record player alone could make one piece of sound many, and be reconstructed into new forms - because it could be *manipulated* forming a whole palette of sound; a bricolage.

This provides me with a useful segue into Hip Hop which revolves (almost literally) around the turntable.

7e. Hip Hop

Two Turntables and a small mixing unit, 'borrowed' electricity and some enormous loudspeakers created a musical revolution during the late 1970s in New York City. It was called Hip Hop.

Hip Hop is a form of musical expression and artistic culture that originated in African-American communities within the city, most notably, Brooklyn. It is worth noting that when using the term 'Hip Hop' we are also referring to a lifestyle of fashion, graffiti art, rap music and social commentary, a bricolage (again) of several connected subcultures. But the turntable is central to the culture, the controller of which is the source of incredibly resourceful musical composition. I would argue that Hip Hop and its younger brother *Turntablism* has been the most successful implementation of an 'overt' bricolage in music:

...in 1967, a Jamaican DJ called Kool Herc moved his sound system to New York, and helped set in motion a looping chain of events that would change the face of popular music for good. ...turntablism is more than dragging a record back and forth across a stylus, or segueing two tracks together nice and smooth. (Shapiro in Young, 2009, p103) Herc isolated [the break] by playing two copies of the same record on two turntables: when the break on one turntable finished, he would repeat it on the other turntable in order to keep the *beat going*. (ibid, pp103-104) With his phonographic flights of fancy, [Grandmaster] Flash made DJing into something more than just spinning records, creating audio montages that went way beyond the smart-ass shenanigans of the Dickie Goodmans²⁷ and Bill Buchanans of this world. (Cutler 2004, in Cox and Warner 2004, p.104)

Like Musique Concrète, Hip Hop is an area in which the musical bricolage is most transparent, with shrewd choices of 'breaks' (snippets of funk and soul records) centralising the DJ as creator and re-appropriator of musical identity. Hip Hop DJs were using turntables that were designed to be moved in one direction only, unlike Schaeffer's Shellac players, but by the use of a 'slip-mat' underneath the vinyl, they could manipulate the sound back and forth by such 'scratching' the record. Furthermore, when two copies of the record were used side by side on two turntables, they could rewind one chunk of sound back on the first deck, whilst on the second deck they played the same chunk and thus, via the mixer, created a seamless

²⁷ Creators of the "break-in" novelty record and consequently partly innovators of a kind of sampling, which often saw them involved in legal entanglements for copyright infringement – something that the hip-hop artists of the 1980s would also face.

assemblage of units.

The 'Break'

In Hip Hop, that 'unit' is called 'the break' - a musical fragment often only seconds in length, which in its original context took the form of an interlude of percussion. Hip Hop DJs assembled these breaks together, live, in highly skilled curatorial displays and live performances often accompanied by spontaneous choreography of (mainly) b(reak)-boys and b-girls dancing to 'the breaks', creating *breakdancing*. *Breakdancing* itself is a bricolage choreography combining urban gymnastics, physical prowess, occasionally a kind of mime and physical theatrics and it is performed in very definite sections and bursts. There is a kind of audacity involved with Hip Hop DJ-ing. Maybe Levi-Strauss had been prophetic in calling the bricoleur devious? For example, there have been many legal battles with DJs trying to make a living from an artform that relied heavily on sampling other people's music.

This 'deviousness' could be seen as a positive thing. These artists often came from conditions of poverty and used bricolage as an emancipator. This approach resonates with my practice, illustrating resourcefulness, in modular methods, from limited means. Moreover, an experienced Hip Hop DJ is a *consummate* craftsman. S/he knows the material, has an innate understanding of mixing records made with different tempos, live, by ear, and is a curator-composer. Early Hip-Hop DJs were exemplars of resourcefulness and it is in Hip Hop where we find the musical bricolage artform *par excellence*.

8. Bricolage as a methodology for the exhausted artist

The examples I have outlined have drawn on diverse worlds, but I have aimed in this section to outline a tradition of displaying cultural artforms that are either unified or disparate in regard to what degree a bricolage is transparent in the work. This project is about raising the quality of life of CFS-ME sufferers through interventions across several disciplines of art practice, but initially practiced by myself, in the first person. Without claiming that such art interventions are a panacea, hopefully the project has refined a modular series of works into a fairly ambitious and cohesive series of art objects – crucially forged by achievable, liveable sets of practical philosophies – a potential future goal of the project. If by bricolage, these interventions have been able to have been made by an exhausted practitioner, and if the interventions *are* different from each other, they will be useful to more sufferers and spill into the different parts of other sufferers' lives, hopefully finding common ground *somewhere in someone*.

Who or what is the exhausted artist?

Having talked about how bricolage has appeared through the arts, I'd like to attempt to define who 'the exhausted artist' actually is. In the first sense the exhausted artist is myself. I have stated that CFS-ME affects around 250,000 people in the UK. Naturally, of that figure, a proportion are artists or people who enjoy or support the arts and would gain some benefit from an arts/philosophy approach to their condition. I count this sub-group of sufferers as 'the exhausted artists' and in most cases, like me, they have also reached the 'end of the line' within their local NHS

services. Even if only 10% of that figure of 250,000 are cultural practitioners or craftspeople or simply creatively inclined people, we could be implementing bricolage-based techniques with 25,000 CFS-ME sufferers.

I reiterate that CFS-ME is a chronic, vague, and generally consistently painful and exhausting illness. Therefore, in terms of bricolage, exhaustion dictates my methodology in creating the projects - and bricolage makes allowances for the tolerances of a chronically exhausted audience (and her/himself).

9. Conclusion

In this chapter I have looked at how bricolage is rooted within cultural practices and that definitions of bricolage (in the classical sense) are perhaps due for some kind of updating or revision. By way of examples we have seen that to be a *bricoleur* is not to be a cheat or be 'devious' – but it may be a shrewd inventive response to a life-changing imperative.

On a personal level, I saw how as my life fell apart, my films followed this pattern. Prior to exploring the idea of bricolage, I had not considered that I am still a filmmaker. I presumed I didn't make films any more. But by realising film is like a kind of text that can be unwoven into modules, I now know that I am still working within the landscape of film by bricolage. I have tried to examine film as both a 'holistic' (or unified) art form and also as a container of individual disciplines. So despite my film

career ending many years ago, it seems I have still been making films, but perhaps in slower motion.

I may lay out the final products I have made for this project: a blue record, a red record and a yellow record, and remove the blue sleeve, the red sleeve and the yellow sleeve. In doing so, I reveal the coloured vinyls themselves, and can look at the sleeve notes before, after or during playing these discs - before flipping the sleeve over to examine the photographic montage on each sleeve. Then, it is clear to see how a filmmaker may have constructed these items. They are 'fragmented films.' Made in a modular fashion across text, image and sound the vinyl LP format, 12" in size is a logical format for a filmmaker to employ when assailed by an illness that prevents formal location-based filmmaking.

Chapter 5:

The Sonic Contexts of the Project

1. Introduction
2. Nomenclature and niches of vinyl records
3. Is sound-art the dominant field?
4. Is music the dominant field?
5. Is radio-art the dominant field?
6. Therefore, the analogue record as an art is the dominant field
- 6b. The Recording Angel
 - i) The need to make beauty and pleasure permanent
 - ii) The need to comprehend beauty
 - iii) The need to distinguish oneself as a consumer
 - iv) The need to belong
 - v) The need to impress others, or oneself.
7. Audio, music and interdisciplinary artists
8. The re-rise, risks and rewards of vinyl records

1. Introduction

a) ...THE PRESENT DAY METHODS OF WRITING MUSIC, PRINCIPALLY THOSE WHICH EMPLOY HARMONY AND ITS REFERENCE TO PARTICULAR STEPS IN THE FIELD OF SOUND, WILL BE INADEQUATE FOR THE COMPOSER, WHO WILL BE FACED WITH THE ENTIRE FIELD OF SOUND...

b) Wherever we are, what we hear is mostly noise. When we ignore it, it disturbs us. When we listen to it, we find it fascinating. The sound of a truck at 50 miles per hour. Static between the stations. Rain. We want to capture and control these sounds, to use them not as sound effects but as musical instruments. Every film studio has a library of 'sound effects' recorded on film. With a film phonograph it is now possible to control the amplification and frequency of any one of these sounds and to give to it rhythms within or beyond the reach of the imagination. Given four film phonographs, we can compose and perform a quartet for explosive motor, wind, heartbeat and landslide.

John Cage, 1937²⁸

(Lander and Lexier 2013, p.15)

Many purveyors of cultural works consider bespoke vinyl records to be an artform outside music alone. This is not an unusual view; the interplay between the

²⁸ Both quotes originate from a talk given by John Cage titled "The Future of Music: Credo" delivered for a Seattle arts society organised by Bonnie Bird in 1937. Source: p15 of the anthology Sound by Artists (Edited by Lander, Lexier – pub. Blackwood Gallery University of Toronto, Mississauga 2013 – facsimile reprint of 1990 edition)

vinyl record and the cultural world has a strong heritage, as we can see from the introductory quote from 1937 where John Cage is placing an image of four record players (or ‘phonographs’) in one’s mind, which impressively, in 2014, would pass as a viable sonic art installation in any major city in the world – and indeed, has done in recent memory. One example is Janek Schaefer’s *Extended Play [Triptych for the child survivors of war and conflict]* (Schaefer, 2008). Commissioned for the Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival in 2007, nine interactive, multispeed record players, grouped in threes, fitted with motion sensors, play bespoke vinyl records asynchronously, in a work that reminds us both of Cage’s prophetic statements and that also represents how relevant vinyl records still are, in both cultural and personal terms. When Cage writes in 1937, about composing for ‘explosive motor, wind, heartbeat and landslide’ he could be describing elements of this research project. It is clear that the sonic worlds of this research project are also part of a wider phonographic lineage and with a recorded technology heritage.

The purpose of this chapter is to explore in further detail the aspects of the work that are culturally situated in relation to sonic art and the record-as-art-object. So far, the project has been described as an *art* project and process. Thus, I have assumed the reader would accept the physical aspect of the project as a piece of art. However, to state that these records *are* art may be surprising for some audiences who associate records only with the music/sounds stored on them or associate the word ‘art’ with only painterly or sculptural qualities. For such a hypothetical audience, music may be one *of* the arts, but defining a record ‘as an artwork’ may perhaps be perplexing.

This project has taken the form of vinyl records containing music and sound-art, texts and visual artwork connected by colour-coded graphic design, emphasising linked themes throughout. The audio, texts and imagery were designed to be co-dependent on each other, both to mirror the ‘holistic’²⁹ ideals of the project and also because each of these pieces are ‘fragmented films’ in the sense I outlined in Chapter 4. However, some further investigation and contextualisation is needed to specify the *artistic/sonic* field within which this project is situated. By negating those terms of reference that do not fit the process embarked upon, we will, by a process of elimination find the closest cultural niche within which these bespoke sonic objects reside.

2. Nomenclature and niches of vinyl records

Many people completely jettisoned vinyl records years ago, perhaps even decades ago, and are now more familiar with listening to CDs or other digital files with little physical artwork. Some may reasonably question the producing of a work via a ‘redundant technology’ such as vinyl at all, let alone calling it art. Ironically, young adults may have no problem embracing vinyl records, as they now serve as a kind of entry to a subculture which was previously a wholly popular and mass produced phenomenon. Indeed, today’s young adults, perhaps born in the late 1990s, may play a part in spearheading the current vinyl resurgence, often to the surprise of their parents (and this wouldn’t be the first time vinyl records have been part of a rebellion).

²⁹ *Holism* has been defined and explored in its own chapter In this text.

A 2013 article in the New York Times profiles Josh Bizar, a sales director of a cluster of plants that produce vinyl turntables and which also holds vinyl stock. Bizar states that his company Music Direct sold 500,000 LPs and thousands of turntables during 2012:

...you're seeing young kids collecting records like we did when we were young... We never expected the vinyl resurgence to become as crazy as it is... But it's come full circle. We get kids calling us up and telling us why they listen to vinyl, and when we ask them why they don't listen to CDs, they say, 'CDs? My dad listens to CDs — why would I do that?'

(Koznin, 2013, n.p.)

How LP records are named, categorised and digested is not only important for the librarian and commercial vendors of records but also for purveyors of such 'niche' artefacts; the latter are apocryphally notorious for strongly identifying and aligning themselves alongside their hard-sought collections, perhaps thus gaining entry to a vinyl collecting subculture. Therefore, what category this project sits in will have implications for a potential audience and where the record is found (i.e. record shop or gallery? 'mainstream' or 'niche'?) and the implications of the traditions in which the work is situated, e.g. my sense of being part of a contemporary vinyl record movement. Let us thus attempt to discard or retain any potential headings of what this project is or isn't. One might ask what is the dominant sonic context or field for *The Idioholism Vinyl Trilogy*?

3. Is sound-art the dominant field?

Sonically, this project finds itself between two goalposts. On the one hand, the project is perhaps too experimental to be considered 'formal' music as such, and yet too broad an enterprise to isolate the sound from the package and call it a purely sound-art work. Moreover, sound-art projects often require an installation or space of some kind. There is only the merest hint of this in the project. Rather, the intention is to make objects that may be flexibly translated to a number of (usually personal or private) spaces. It could be argued that these objects may have potential as installation pieces, and could be adapted as such. However, in my case, the imagery and sleevenotes on the records serve more as directions and suggestions for how to listen to the work, even if they are texts or visual montages in their own right. Perhaps the kind of detailed text on the sleevenotes wouldn't translate well for an installation. The images too, are inextricably linked to the sound, but serve the role of priming the listener also. They were designed a little like 'storyboards': they help unify the experience and are best looked at before or during playing. Therefore, because of these other elements, the trilogy lies only *partly* within sound-art, but it is definitely related to that discipline, so perhaps it is better not to dispense with the term just yet.

Sometimes sound art and music are related. LP1's main body of audio may be termed 'broken music' – that of a 'ruined' harmonium - and in LP2 and LP3, any musical qualities are integrated into local cultural phenomena and field recordings: Provençal cicadas and Scottish bagpipes are used here not for a love of the music or sound they produce but because they are presented on the LP as a kind of methodology of the exhausted artist - i.e. one of 'traveling without moving' so to

speak, my working on whatever doorstep I find. In addition, these records have seen the creator pursue some direct methodologies of the sound artist: i.e. using highly specialised equipment such as hydrophones (underwater microphones), contact mics (where one can slot mics inside tree bark for example) and induction coil pick-up microphones (which can pick up electrical buzzes and hums around a suburban space for example, scanning electrical circuits and pulses such as a microwave or internet router). Whilst these techniques may also be employed in science, these pieces of equipment have been sourced from Jez Riley French, a sound artist who also makes microphones for field recordists and fellow artists. The statement below illustrates his approach:

My work involves elements of intuitive composition, field recording (using conventional & extended methods), photographic images / photographic scores and improvisation.

(French, 2014, n.p.)

Moreover, in this project, the methodologies and processes are as important as the product, something we frequently find in *art* practice and *art* therapy and sound-art. The techniques I have used and the methodologies I have pursued have become quite integrated, certainly in the soundtracks. I have tended to amalgamate the music and spoken words, the buzzes and natural sounds; all of these elements are merged into composed soundscapes, as opposed to many sound artists, particularly those working in the field of 'acoustic ecology' or 'soundscapes', many of whom leave such sound sources unedited or frequently untreated. But overall, my works are also

influenced by my days working in documentary media (in the 1990s) and as a result are probably closer to a radio-soundscape model.

If this project can be defined as sound-art, it is of a relatively accessible type. There is spoken word here, and field recording, piano music, insects, broken instruments; and that makes for a compelling case for contextualising the work as a sound art project. But I have no control as to how the listener may listen to it and on what it will be listened on. So my emphasis must be on the records themselves. It is about objects that are related to sound: the *records*. If I located the project purely in sound-art there would remain the nagging idea that it is too wide reaching to be focused simply in this arena. These are records that encompass the multiple media and layers I have spoken about. And 12" vinyl LPs are rarely just about the sounds that they contain (whilst the sound has its ardent fans), which has probably helped them survive – they are intended as a ‘conceptual package’ perhaps akin to the ‘concept album’ of the 1970s.

4. Is music the dominant field?

Artists’ records are still sold in record shops, usually under ‘experimental’ or ‘other’ sections of the store. These records, as I’ve previously hinted, are like fragments of films; all made to ‘prime’ the sonic contents and also to work with each other as a unified package. But what of these sonic contents? And what of the *music* on the records?

Aesthetically, the sonic work is more soundscape-like than a set of isolated musical tracks, resembling more the 'radio-ballad' (expanded in the next section)- a documentary format created by Ewan MacColl, Peggy Seeger, and Charles Parker in 1958. Perhaps its no surprise that because of my documentary background that this element in my training bleeds over into this project. Music on the records blends with environmental recordings of neighbourhoods, nature, spoken word, and unspecific tones.

In the project, across the three records, music is at least an equal bedfellow with field-recordings and the noises listed above, alongside photography and graphic design. So let us leave music, but stay within the grooves and look at soundscapes – specifically one example that may be termed 'radio-art'.

5. Is radio-art the dominant field?

The work isn't *on* the radio *as such*, but the sound component was made with an ear for potential radio broadcast, so it's worth looking a little more at the 'radio-ballads' that have been influential to this project and to documentary radio as an entity. They effectively changed how British radio approached the long-form radio documentary. The BBC's Radio Ballad project outlines the first radio ballad commissioned by the institution:

[In 1957], folksinger and activist Ewan MacColl [was asked to] write the script for a radio feature about the steam-locomotive driver John Axon, whose act of railway heroism earlier that year had cost him his life and earned him the posthumous award of the George Cross. Returning from the field with over forty hours of recorded material from Axon's widow and workmates about his life and death, MacColl saw the strength of the material and persuaded [The BBC] to use the real voices rather than actors, an unheard-of practice at the time. Then - and this is what really sets the Ballads apart - MacColl wrote songs inspired by the stories, with music directed by Peggy Seeger performed by orchestral and folk musicians. A new, hybrid format emerged, in which the original voices, carefully edited and interwoven with the music, could tell the story without the need for actors or additional script.

(bbc.co.uk n.d.³⁰)

To a degree, a form with such hybridity *is* very similar to how I have made these three records, except I am carrying out all the jobs of composing, researching, art directing and so on. My *Eskdalemuir Harmonium* (LP1 – Dooks/Zuyderveldt, 2011) contained a specially recorded five-minute ‘radio’ documentary commemorating an eccentric Tuba-playing Texan who bought harmoniums and likely brought them to Scotland, had died, and his daughter recounts his life. So one might argue that the project includes forms of radio art, like the *Axon* example above, because it combines narration, field recordings and music together, and it is within progressive radio documentary that we find the nearest form that combines these aggregates.

³⁰ http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio2/radioballads/original/orig_history.shtml

A contemporary example could be the kinds of works that are often made for BBC Radio 3's "Between the Ears" programme (BBC, 1993-2014). But two factors negate this. Crucially – the works have not been broadcast, although the definition of what defines 'the airwaves' is becoming complex, with FM, DAB, 4G and WIFI all enabling a transmission of some kind with a transmitter and receiver being employed.

The second reason this is not radio art is that radio art requires *little need for packaging* and this research project could have taken the form of three sound files. Moreover, the issue of why make three expensive *coloured* vinyl records comes up. There is a strong emphasis on pictures and design concepts. This rarely happens in radio, where most of the time, the listener is asked to make their own pictures up from the sounds, whereas in this project, on the sleeves, images are displayed giving a sense of direction on how to experience the contents. So we perhaps we may need to shelve the radio art tag for now.

6. Therefore, the analogue record as an art is the dominant field

Given the logic of negating sound-art, music and radio art as the dominant vehicle or format of the project, the principal sonic context that this project can be contained best under is 'the analogue record' and 'the analogue record as art'. The 12" vinyl record is a unique and well-trodden artform currently enjoying a resurgence. It is a *phonographic* artform. The term 'phonography' neatly describes the cultural location of this project, being used to describe practitioners where the phonograph, record or

record player is crucial to their practice, - but the word is also used in other critical lineages³¹.

Douglas Kahn's essay *Audio Art in The Deaf Century* lays out the terrain for the term:

...the phonographic arts are retarded because there hasn't been a phonographic art. This is not necessarily an undesirable state. Just the opposite. It signals an expanse of artistic opportunity where other arts battle exhaustion. Elsewhere there may be talk of an endgame. Here, it is a season opener.

(Lander and Lexier 2013, p.302)

However in the context of this project, the word 'phonography' is a logical, straightforward and apt word to describe the actual artform and practice of the phonograph or record turntable – or simply the vinyl record. Not to be confused with *phonology* (a branch of linguistics concerned with the systematic organization of sounds in languages), *phonography* used here is referring to the analogue record as an artform. Audio-wise, Phonography has also been used to describe the study of (in many cases) another acoustic phenomenon - that of field recording. In recent times the word phonography has also been used in relation to the increasing re-emergence and critical enquiry of vinyl record art, and/or rather, in the vinyl record *as* art.

³¹ <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/phonography> alternative meanings - 'spelling based on pronunciation' and 'a system of shorthand writing based on sound'. It also may refer to the study of field recording, which may have originally been completed with a portable phonograph such as used by Pierre Schaeffer – see http://homepage.smc.edu/tobey_christine/varese/schaefer.html also in the next section we will look at how Evan Eisenberg most significantly re-introduced this word in the mid 1980s referring to the practice of recording vinyl records.

6b. The Recording Angel

A key text, or even *the* key 'phonographic' text is *The Recording Angel* by Evan Eisenberg (1987 / 2005³²). The Eisenberg text is so important in this field because it orientates itself around the word 'record' with both inclusive and esoteric reference points. Instead of taking a purely technological or historical stance with the recorded medium by and large, this is a book that meditates expansively on [primarily vinyl] records as a serious artform. The tagline of the first edition includes the term as 'Explorations in Phonography', which was dropped for the tagline of the second edition to: 'Music, Records and Culture from Aristotle to Zappa'. But Eisenberg's text never loses sight of the object itself, the record - in either a conceptual nor practical object-orientated sense. Other books on vinyl records tend to be either about record collecting or have evolved from further niches plucked from a given zeitgeist such as *turntablism*, hip-hop niches – or exhibitions about record sleeves and using records in installations. Eisenberg is a vinyl record *philosopher*.

Throughout the 20th Century, like vinyl, 16mm or 35mm film was, more or less an example of the last great universal format. A 12" LP bought in Delhi in 1967 would play on all the most expensive boutique 'audiophile' players today. I own records that are over one hundred years old and play them with a dedicated needle in my studio on the same turntable I play the records made for this project. Outside of the printed word, it's hard to argue for a longer-lasting cultural form reliant on a technology. Record players predate our more recent 'format wars' - our current divergence of digital formats. There are a bewildering array of audio and video digital formats and

³² Second edition with an afterward on digital media was published by *Yale University Press* 2005 – I cite both texts due to the second edition feeling markedly different to the first – updated as it is with a chapter on digital media.

devices, connectors and protocols; wired or wireless playback used to program, personalise and order our media 'experience' (which I shall not list exhaustively here). Instead, *The Recording Angel* can be seen as a 'call of the arcane' and it's not necessarily a nostalgic one. Eisenberg is a well-read surveyor. He reminds us that a record is a simple and pure a format as it gets. It is a circle. On the turntable, it revolves like a simple orrery.³³ It stands alone somewhat and paradoxically becomes modern by us *rediscovering* it (and the book being given a second wind via vinyl's newest wave, forced Eisenberg to at least revise it in 2005 with a few hundred words on mp3 files).

In the following section I comment on a particular chapter in Eisenberg's *The Recording Angel* as to why one might collect vinyl records. I do this because I think the same issues are relevant for the artists who now *make* collector's editions of vinyl, such as myself in this research project. In both instances, the collector and creator of vinyl records could also be called a 'phonographer'.

Eisenberg begins his book with a chapter on a man who has social and health problems whose house (which is falling apart) on every floor is crammed with, in the main, 78rpm records (p1-8). There are tens of thousands of them stacked, shoved and littered everywhere. The collector's name is Clarence. Affected by his visit to Clarence, in the following piece, Eisenberg reflects on five ideas on why we collect cultural objects, often to extreme lengths:

33 Mechanical model of the solar system showing the planets relative distance from the sun, often clockwork.

The collecting of cultural objects can satisfy any number of needs, among which snobbery may not be the most important. Here is a tentative list.

i) The need to make beauty and pleasure permanent.

As beautiful sights and sounds go by one tries to grab them rather than trust [that] others as beautiful, to come around again. This indicates a mistrust of the world, a mistrust that goes back to the Greeks (at least) and helps explain why they made and preserved so much art...

...The paradox was seen most clearly by Blake:

“He who binds to himself to a joy, Does the winged life destroy;

But he who kisses the joy as it flies, Lives in eternity’s sun rise.”

(Eisenberg 2005, p.14)

So there are two themes here. One is ‘mistrust’ of the world, that beauty is incredibly rare and will not be seen ever again. I have sometimes tried to snare this beauty in my record collecting and making. We see this all the time in popular media with endless checklists such as “The Ten Records You Have to Own” as if ten more records as beautiful will never be made in the future.

But secondly, and paradoxically, there is a constant debate around the idea of permanence and the lack of it, at the heart of many record collectors and artists who

make the objects themselves. Given that nothing is truly permanent anyway, we are, at best talking about the right sort of container as a temporary vessel for ideas. To some extent LPs are more vulnerable than CDs or hard drives containing mp3 files, but they take up more space on the earth and are by their sheer size and fragility alone, examples of, at best, snapshots of creative and aesthetic enquiry. Eisenberg continues...

ii) **The need to comprehend beauty**

Beauty has its intellectual side, which is the more beautiful the better it's understood. When the mind exercises its prehensility, it is natural for the fingers to take part, if only to keep the object in striking distance of the mind.

Certainly owning a book or record permits one to study the work repeatedly and at one's convenience. The danger lies in mistaking ownership for mastery.

(ibid, p.14)

Obviously this is a very subjective point of view. But this quote almost predicts and permits a praxis: "*Beauty has its intellectual side*", as if the senses can be the gateway for enquiry. Earlier I stated that records and filmmaking can be aesthetically driven, intellectually driven, neither or both. Here though, Eisenberg is warning that without proper care and curiosity, one will not benefit from the objects and he infers one would be a kind of empty person that buys records for all the wrong reasons:

“The danger lies in mistaking ownership for mastery.”

Most music fans do not suddenly wake up and decide that they *need* to buy a record that particular day. Moreover, all the records I have made for this research project are for sale, so there is a commercial aspect to the work, and seducing an audience through appropriate packaging touches slightly on a marketing strategy. Of the Idioholism Trilogy, *The Eskdalemuir Harmonium*, which is sold through a Canadian record label, was released internationally in an edition of 500, and LP2 and LP3 are also produced in runs of 500, taking up half a room in my house. Eisenberg comments on this obtuse need below.

iii) **The need to distinguish oneself as a consumer**

In capitalism there are first heroes of production and then (as Riesman has shown) heroes of consumption. These are people who spend on a heroic scale, perhaps, or with heroic discrimination.

(ibid, p.15)

It is this ‘heroic discrimination’ that Eisenberg also flags when talking about Clarence. I have fallen prey to some of these tendencies also by purchasing a record that cost nearly £100 to obtain, something I am unlikely to do again for an awfully long time. Eisenberg sees this kind of behaviour, as anti-consumerist perhaps because of the discipline - and not ease - in which one isolates, pursues and finally owns such objects in this highly discriminatory manner.

The true hero of consumption is a rebel against consumption. By taking acquisition to an ascetic extreme he repudiates it, and so transplants himself to an older and nobler world...

(ibid p.15)

How may one interpret this poetic description of the vinyl purist? Of those record collectors who are not just investing in records for financial worth? Although Eisenberg here is placing the vinyl collector on a pedestal with a sense of 'religiosity', he then places the caveat that "the prodigal son is not just a show-off" before a sense of melancholy descends, describing the collector as wedded to a kind of loneliness, or quest for empathy.

iv) The need to belong

Considered as a feeling, this need might be called nostalgia. When one feels nostalgia for a time one has lived in or wishes one had lived in, cultural objects are a fairly dignified tonic. What is really a wallowing in atavism can pass for the appreciation of timeless beauty...

(ibid, p.15)

Here, in my view, 'phonography' and the large resurgence in record buying has been a call for both a 'sense of communion' among certain audiences, and also a quiet form of people power on some level coming from a feeling of disempowerment of a world that continues to alienate. Vinyl record buying is seen as anti-corporation and more bespoke, even perhaps 'local.' Records are expensive to post, and so perhaps

force more emphasis on locality, as are pilgrimages to cities based on their record shops.

Moreover, because record players are what would be termed 'backwards compatible' (i.e. they play old records which can be bought from charity shops as well as the latest vinyl) – this format could act as a kind of social ouijaboard, helping to historically orientate both young and old alike in our world with its bewildering and fast moving modernity. A fifteen-year-old girl may now raid her grandfather's LPs and hear them, more or less as he did. That it may skip a generation is interesting. Earlier I cited Josh Bizar, owner of pressing plants in the US, talking about a teenager who does not want to consume music like her father, who may listen to CDs and mp3s on his iPhone. That the father might not 'get' the 'record thing' but the *grandfather* might could trigger interesting family conversations where mementos of the past can form bridges with a family's newest generation. In terms of Clarence's story, the *lack* of any noticeable family in the house forces us to look at this phenomena as the beginning of an attachment that Eisenberg warns is an addictive one (and a more alienating force).

...The cultural objects, whatever their nature, are mementos that somehow remain unhumanised by the force of a genuinely fetishistic attachment...

...When relating to the group becomes too difficult - because its standards are unjust, because it is unfaithful, or because it cannot be found - fetishism is the sensible alternative.

This is where Clarence seems to have arrived, by a fairly circuitous route...

(Eisenberg, 2005, p.16)

Ultimately, with Clarence, instead as records for family use, he sees records *as* family. In the fifth subheading about the needs of collecting (and perhaps aligning oneself with) vinyl records, there is the following aspect of collecting which is concerned with belonging to a kind of in-crowd, even an elite – and questioning why one would do this:

v) The need to impress others, or oneself

This can be simple philistine snobbery or something subtler...

(ibid, p.16)

Eisenberg seems to validate the sensory aspects of collecting cultural objects without knowing everything about them, perhaps warning that there can be a kind of gluttony here, of simply buying records blindly.

...Hillel the Elder warned against using scripture as a worldly crown. I think this was directed not only at show-offs, but also at all intellectuals who like to feel the sweet weight of culture on their heads. The Aramaic word for crown, taga, also describes the calligraphic filigree with which scribes adorn certain letters in a biblical scroll. How many book collectors really go for the words and ideas and not rather the typeface, the odour of fresh ink or ageing paper, the satisfying shape of a name -

‘Hillel the Elder’, for example? The point is that one can have a sincere love of culture without having any interest in it. That kind of love is almost as well satisfied by owning records as by listening to them (ibid pp.16-17)

In this section, we have flagged, via Eisenberg, some of the social arguments about the value(s) of record collecting. This is part of the culture of ‘phonography’ - where this project is partly located. Whoever makes vinyl records, especially those of sound-art and specialist music, (which are released in editions of typically 100, 300 or 500) – the makers can also be the audience and consumers of similar products. Up to half of the consumers in my sales have also been producers of similar work. They form dialogues between small enclaves of artists. This is not dissimilar to a PhD being read, or experienced, by other academics – in small, relatively specialised clusters: perhaps cited a few dozen times, and then stored for future reference.

The phonographic artist’ who is also trying to sell their records needs the respect of their peers, yet at the same time they may desire to evangelise their ‘insights’ to new audiences or customers. Personal communication, email and dialogues with individual buyers are part of making and selling such niche media. Therefore the link between maker and listener in boutique-style recorded media such as the 12” LP, can often be experienced as a reciprocal and intimate relationship.

All of this suggests that we can now, reasonably comfortably, locate the project in phonography and make a case for a vinyl trilogy as a relevant and practical format *for the exhausted artist*. But the truth is, alongside *Phonography* my work is located in

probably all of the contexts above in and in a smaller niche we may term them 'fragmented films'.

Before we leave Eisenberg, I'd like to acknowledge that since *The Recording Angel* was initially published in the mid-eighties there has been a strong tide of texts published about sound arts in the wider sense – of which post-vinyl culture may be considered a part. One text which explores that culture of what defines a *record* in the near-present sense of the word is Greg Milner's *Perfecting Sound Forever* (Milner, 2009) – the nearest I have come to a modern 'sequel' of Eisenberg's philosophical and meditative text. However, in the main, texts specifically on vinyl cultures tend to be focused on collecting records or the fetishisation of vinyl – or, are individual essays and interviews in journals or magazines. Further still, they are frequently multimedia artefacts such as the documentary *Vinylmania*. As a result, *The Recording Angel* is still seen by many as a key, if not the key text of the 'phonographic arts' – in the footnote I also acknowledge the debt this project owes to contemporary texts about field recording, which is best explored in the sleevenotes section.

In this chapter, I've chosen to emphasise the vinyl record over the process of field recording, which is explored in the sleevenotes. One could argue field recording is a key component of this project so it is worthwhile to similarly acknowledge the recent work by CRiSAP (Creative Research into Sound Arts Practice) which is part of the collection of institutions working together as the University of The Arts London. One text in particular which orientates itself around field recording was associated with a CRiSAP symposium at The British Library is *In The Field* (Lane and Carlyle, 2013); it is an ambitious anthology and survey of the current field of field recording:

Field recordings are composed with, performed in concert venues, installed in galleries, released as CDs, worked into an audio-visual matrix with film and other media and made available in sound maps and other online forms of distribution.

(Lane/Carlyle, *In The Field*, p.11, 2013)

The text is comprised chiefly of an expansive series of interviews which builds on a sister publication by CRiSAP *Autumn Leaves: Sound and Environment in Artistic Practice* (ed: Angus Carlyle, 2007) where a wider context of sonic art practice sits. Given that this project places sound in a multi-or inter-disciplinary practice in something I have termed 'the fragmented film' I felt it useful to weight further enquiry on this 'intertextuality' where music and sound is becoming an increasingly equal bedfellow with new media artists who may have once described themselves (as I did) being part of filmmaking.

7. Audio, music and interdisciplinary artists

Perhaps we should not be too concerned with the perceived difference between visual artists, sound artists, musicians and those who describe themselves as working as working in new media, or defining themselves as 'intertextual' artists, 'cross-disciplinary' artists, 'interdisciplinary' artists and so on. Certainly what matters to me before I attend any cultural event is the *project* itself, not just the contextual positioning of it. It is no longer a novelty to learn that a visual artist is making a record. For example, in 2013, artist Dinos Chapman quietly released an electronica album

Luftbobler to a fair amount of acclaim, but not open-jawed shock that a prominent visual artist had made a record.

In David Ryan's essay, '*We have Eyes as well as Ears... Experimental Music and the Visual Arts*', which appears in the *Ashgate Research Companion to Experimental Music* (p193, 2009), the author flags the breadth of both recent volleys between cultural forms and artists, alongside a suggested origin of such cross-pollinated practices.

Martin Creed conducting an 'orchestra' playing one note; Hayley Newman staging a choir that smokes cigarettes; and Anri Sala, so captivated by the detuned clash of two contrasting musical pieces on a radio, that he recreates it as a video performance in a gallery. Each of these pieces by contemporary artists not only reference sound as their basic material, but also question the social context, collective activity, and assumptions that surround the performance of those sounds...

(Ryan, 2009 in Saunders, 2009 (ed.) p.193)

Anri Sala's piece³⁴ cited in the previous quote might have some connection with the first track on my final LP for this project *CIGA{R}LES*, where I place myself between two competing pipe-bands who carve 'authorship' on the soundclash between them. Certainly, chance, serendipity, appropriation and authorship would be key themes of Sala's piece, which I wasn't aware of when I made mine. The piece of Sala's that Ryan

³⁴ Whilst being unaware of this piece when making my own records (being involved in a near-hermit-like sense of isolation for several years with them) I am influenced by Steve Reich's 'phase patterns' series of works where two sound sources falling in and out of synch is gripping enough to be interesting and wide enough a phenomena to pursue original works in.

cites is *Spurious Emission*, where radio signals that overlapped on a car journey became his source of re-creating the soundclash with live performers. This level of recreation might be off the radar for the exhausted artist, but it is a good example of noticing something accidental, of being free as to what media it would require, and sometimes changing the context of how it is performed. Ryan rightly suggests this interplay is nothing particularly new, and moreover the artists that originated and pioneered these sort of techniques are being championed again, as the wider cultural audience slowly catches up:

Many practitioners of the 1960s and 1970s, directly affected by the first generation of experimental composers, are still active. Increased traffic has occurred between disciplines: Max Neuhaus migrated in the late 1960s from virtuoso percussionist to installation artist, while Phill Niblock, on the other hand, began his career as a filmmaker and began developing music by composing from taped sounds, in a manner similar to re-editing visual material. Often Niblock's drone pieces are simultaneously accompanied by his films of people engaged in manual work from footage shot across the world, each in their own way hypnotic.

(ibid, p.212)

Ryan's point is that the recent taste for interdisciplinary art/music practice is in fact recent heritage. Whether or not Dinos Chapman continues to make electronic music for the rest of his career or not, some artists continue to remain multi-disciplinary as they progress through their lives:

Other artists have maintained multi-disciplinary approaches to their work, such as Charlemagne Palestine who from the early 1970s on has straddled installation, video, performance and music in his activities. Trained as a Cantor in New York, Palestine, whose works make use of either the voice or extended interference patterns on the piano, sees his work as an extension of the expressive depth of Rothko's or Newman's paintings. Atmosphere certainly prevails in his ritualistic approach, with low coloured lighting or ambience, and often with the appearance of fetishized stuffed toys embodying transitional objects in his performances.

(ibid, p.216)

8. The re-rise, risks and rewards of vinyl records

Vinyl is growing out of its niche. There were always record collectors who disdained the compact disc, arguing that an LP's grooves yielded warmth and depth that the CD's digital code could not match. But the market largely ignored them.

(Koznin, 2013, n.p.)

I am in my small office-studio surrounded by crates of 12" LP records. There are picture discs, coloured vinyl, audiophile 180gram collectors editions, pull out posters, download codes or CD versions gifted with current vinyl. Near to this are rows of specialist music journals and many copies of *The Wire*, arguably the world's most influential 'niche music' publication. But as the Koznin continues to flag, this vinyl niche isn't quite so *niche* presently:

These days, every major label and many smaller ones are releasing vinyl, and most major new releases have a vinyl version, leading to a spate of new pressing plants. When the French electronica duo Daft Punk released "Random Access Memories" in mid-May, 6 per cent of its first-week sales — 19,000 out of 339,000 — were on vinyl, according to Nielsen SoundScan, which measures music sales.

(ibid. n.p.)

It's clear from placing a doctorate in this area that I am a vinyl record enthusiast as a producer — but perhaps less apparent that I am also as a *collector*. As

well as occasionally falling prey to greedily obtaining new vinyl like the example above, I have a strong record (no pun intended) of ‘rescuing’ vinyl LPs from rubbish bins, or records that are every collector’s dream – true charity shop trophies, where a treasured edition can be scooped as a bargain for a small donation. This is the practice of *crate digging*. Then there’s my ‘78 collection primarily sourced from eBay, where I collect records about morse code, theatre sound effects (my personal highlight is ‘band tuning up’) and spoken word pieces, such as an aural survey of London Zoo. Ebay is the biggest crate of all. There, I collect ‘private press’ records, one-off novelty recordings that were recorded in booths in the United States (but also here in the UK) where a few decades ago, for a small fee you could record two minutes of personal audio on a one-off piece of vinyl. These booths did good business in show-grounds of the 1950s and 1960s but by the 1980s when tapes and the CD had dominated, even large scale pressing plants struggled to cope with the rise of the CD...

Record labels shuttered their LP pressing plants, except for a few that pressed mostly dance music, since vinyl remained the medium of choice for DJs. As it turned out, that early resistance was not futile, thanks largely to an audience of record collectors, many born after CDs were introduced in the 1980s.

(Koznin, 2013, n.p.)

However, this vinyl phenomenon doesn’t stop the emergence of a ‘prophet of doom’ on the horizon: a recent edition of *The Wire* had this to say about the current resurgence in vinyl:

Vinyl's violent sales spike has been a lonely bright spot in what has been a 14 year deterioration in sales of recorded music; retailers now celebrate their very own Record Store Day every April. And record stores – those that made it through the 2000s gauntlet and those that, by the sheer force of a newborn paradigm, have sprung forth – are bursting at the browser bins with special 45s, exclusive 10"s, replica LPs and multi-album sets.

(Sevier and Shipley, *The Wire* 353, 2013, p.16)

Perhaps the above warning that the bubble may burst may come true soon (the article above subsequently warns of unsustainability and of faddism). Although it is a primarily academic enterprise, *The Idiolism Vinyl Series* is still for sale, there is a slight commercial aspect to it. Vinyl records are very expensive to produce. It is unlikely that most vinyl records do more than break-even financially unless they are from very successful artists.

The Wire continues to warn that the shape of this sales spike is unusual in the current understanding of the music industry

Goodwill abounds, but among the racks, crowded with product and punters, there's more than a whiff of irrational exuberance. This fully emerged market, though, is distinct from what's been generally termed 'the music business'. That business is, and has been, fundamentally

about manufacturing hits, a volume game with cycles of busts paid for by booms few and far between.

(ibid, p.16)

Earlier I flagged my reasons for wanting to pursue phonography as a home for the 'fragmented filmmaker' and I also explored the five reasons Evan Eisenberg cites in *The Recording Angel* as to why records are desirable. Lets look briefly at his reasons again:

1. The need to make beauty and pleasure permanent
2. The need to comprehend beauty
3. The need to distinguish oneself as a consumer
4. The need to belong
5. The need to impress others, or oneself

I never fully agreed with all of these points and I wanted to personalise others. Point one is immediately debatable, as playing a record always destroys it a little with the needle. Of course that doesn't negate the overriding *need* to make beauty and pleasure permanent.

But there are a few more I would now add, with a bias for the exhausted artist working with records – and with regard to this project:

1. *The need for an 'holistic approach' in presenting music* or to present a version of making a soundtrack-heavy 'film'

2. *The need to perpetuate a universal format* – records bought today can play on players made seventy five years ago. Earlier I stressed that they are 'backwards compatible' and despite new records being expensive, there is an exciting element of recycling, by buying second hand records.

3. *The need to be obtuse.* Records are way less 'convenient' than iPods and digital media. Choosing to work with vinyl could be regarded as a kind of protest in part, at the digital age and of a lack of control if one isn't a member of the 'digiterati.'

And most importantly from the perspective of the *Exhausted Artist* or the *Fragmented Filmmaker*...

4. *...the need to self-medicate through the phonographic arts...*

Chapter 6

A survey of holism as a basis for an artist's intervention

Preface: from Aristotle's *Metaphysics*

1. On defining holism
2. CFS-ME as an 'holistic' illness
3. The birth of the term 'holism'
4. Holism and the encounter between western health and complementary health
5. Criticising holism within the complementary health encounter
6. John Clark's Social Ecology and investigation of holism
- 7a. Gideon Kossoff's 'Radical Holism'
- 7b. Gideon Kossoff - interview responses, early 2012
8. Tarnass and *The Passion of The Western Mind*
9. Making the world strange
10. The radical cosmologies of artists
11. The new testaments of artists? Concluding thoughts

To return to the difficulty which has been stated with respect both to definitions and to numbers, what is the cause of their unity? In the case of all things which have several parts and in which the totality is not, as it were, a mere heap, but the whole is something beside the parts, there is a cause; for even in bodies contact is the cause of unity in some cases, and in others viscosity or some other such quality.

And a definition is a set of words which is one not by being connected together, like the Iliad, but by dealing with one object. What then, is it that makes man one; why is he one and not many, e.g. animal + biped, especially if there are, as some say, an animal-itself and a biped-itself? Why are not those Forms themselves the man, so that men would exist by participation not in man, nor in-one Form, but in two, animal and biped, and in general man would be not one but more than one thing, animal and biped?

Aristotle's Metaphysics, Book VIII Pt. 6

(Translation: Ross, 2014)

1. On defining holism

Today, we hear much about living 'a holistic life'. This project includes holism in the title, but what *is* holism?

The Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy definition

Holism: Any doctrine emphasising the priority of a whole over its parts. In the philosophy of language, this becomes the claim that the meaning of an individual word or sentence can only be understood in terms of its relations to an indefinitely larger body of language, such as a whole theory, or even a whole language or form of life. In the philosophy of mind, a mental state similarly may be identified only in terms of its relations with others. Moderate holism may allow that other things besides these relationships also count; extreme holism would hold that the network of relationships is all we have. A holistic view of science holds that experience only confirms large bodies of doctrine, impinging at the edges, and leaving some leeway over the adjustments it requires. (Blackburn, 2008, p170)

Definitions of holism are multifarious and context-derived. To contextualise use of the word holism in this study, it is important to signify the school of thought aligned closest to the so-called 'holistic' enterprise undertaken. Social anthropologists, philosophers, and both mainstream and complementary health practitioners are some of the professionals that regularly employ the word in diverse ways. Because this project involves experimenting with the term holism in order to part-title the process

(by forging a portmanteau with it), the context becomes pertinent. This chapter explores the implications of labelling the project in relation to a particular kind of holism, where art practice and health care meet.

In the health care context, firstly let us revisit the NHS *Scottish Good Practice Statement on ME-CFS*, 2010, which I flagged early on in Chapter 2:

ME-CFS causes a range of symptoms and it is necessary to adopt a holistic approach (Purdie, 2010).³⁵

Despite originating from a UK governmental body, the above statement does not really define what “holistic” means. This kind of all-encompassing inference is not atypical of the ways in which the term ‘holism’ is sometimes deployed in healthcare. Additionally, in the statement above, the word ‘spiritual’ also appears (see footnote). Some may find ‘spiritual’ to be a word as equally ambiguous as holism.

Like ‘holism’ or ‘holistic’, in both complementary and mainstream healthcare contexts, it is common also to encounter these words packaged in ‘trinities’³⁶ such as ‘mind, body and spiritual’ (care). The effect implied by the unifying of such trinities seems to be a kind of holistic manoeuvre: put another way, it is the inference that a multipronged approach might be an effective methodology for someone with a

³⁵ In the *Good Practice Statement*, holism is defined as: “comprehensive patient care that considers the physical, psychological, social, economic and spiritual needs of the patient and his or her response to the illness” p4

³⁶ Although the *Good Practice Statement* involves five qualities in defining a holistic life, it is interesting to observe how common the phrase “mind body spirit” has been used in holistic health since the 1980s. It is almost as if, those who have lost their primarily (UK Christian) religious faith (as church numbers dwindled in the 1980s dramatically) have had any religious alternative re-packaged but the trinity remains or reappears with more ambiguous sounding terms. The ‘packaging’ of the way holistic health has been disseminated during this time and the experiences I have had in centres with floatation tanks, with acupuncturists has been analogous to church going, of replacing the taking of Eucharist and baptism or confession with a secular but religious-like experience (my inference).

multifaceted problem. In more practical terms, that approach is frequently shorthand to this 'trinity' of three zones or regions of human life, presumably suggesting that a system of integration or interconnectedness is how we should treat those health problems which are *idiopathic*³⁷ – i.e. those which have no known causality, such as CFS-ME.

My work could be regarded as an offshoot of this kind of 'holistic manoeuvre', that involves utilising a kind of secular trinity; in other words an interconnected 'triple-pronged' approach. In doing so I attempt to subtly reference this tradition, but with my own headings.

It is worth remembering that the symptoms of CFS-ME I laid out in Chapter 2 (pp.31-33) are extremely wide-ranging and even vague. There may perhaps be a refreshing comfort to be had as an ME sufferer to see that within the NHS *Good Practice Statement*, there is at least a sense that the patient is not being dismissed; holism here may imply an instruction to 'be as thorough as is possible' in the absence of a panacea. But, perhaps unsurprisingly, we tend not to see lengthy ontological definitions of holism in such documents like the example above, perhaps because the motivation behind this kind of holism is purely practical, or possibly even desperate.

Whilst one sees criticisms of unspecific or hyperbolic definitions of holism, especially in complementary health care, it is worth remembering that it is not necessarily a bad thing to want to treat someone with an all-encompassing disease by

³⁷ *adj. denoting a disease or condition the cause of which is not known or that arises spontaneously.* Oxford Medical Dictionary <http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780199557141.001.0001/acref-9780199557141-e-4863?rskey=EVJW8h&result=5297>

trying all potential solutions - especially when a more readily locatable lung, heart or brain malfunction cannot be found. This has been a motivation for my own first-person work and the development of an artist's 'holistic' model. We have to use those terms and culture that already exist, but we can augment and redefine such words to our own ends as the ever-changing nature of language branches outwards along epistemological junctures. Here, from Healey (1999) are a couple of examples of the transferability of the term, or examples of the 'prefixing' of holism as a concept:

i) 'Methodological' Holism: an understanding of a certain kind of complex system is best sought at the level of principles governing the behaviour of the whole system, and not at the level of the structure and behaviour of its component parts.

ii) 'Metaphysical' Holism: The metaphysical holist believes that the nature of some wholes is not determined by that of their parts. One may distinguish three varieties of metaphysical holism: ontological, property and nomological holism.

(Healey, 1999, n.p.)

As we can see, holism as a concept can be minutely categorised also as authors re-appropriate the term within their given niches. Healy continues:

Ontological Holism: Some objects are not wholly composed of basic physical parts.

Property Holism: Some objects have properties that are not determined by physical properties of their basic physical parts.

Nomological Holism: Some objects obey laws that are not determined by fundamental physical laws governing the structure and behaviour of their basic physical parts.

(ibid, 1999)

What are we to conclude of these definitions? The examples above primarily emanate from ontological enquiry in academic philosophy and speak to that audience. It is common that any definition of holism seems to be accompanied with highly specific caveats or even full treatises of how *that* particular holism may be utilised by *a* particular enquiry and a particular audience. As we look towards a first-person discourse into improving one's life through practical holistic methods, the critical discourse around holism helps to give continuity and gravitas to what may be an occasionally contentious word. But perhaps there lies opportunities for creative practitioners when the word holism or holistic appears to be so flexible.

Perhaps it will be in the contexts of real-world health care, kinds of ecology or artist-led discourse that more creative or 'applied' holism – or for want of a better phrase, 'engaged holism' can be explored: that which affects policy and is flexible enough to be applied to (individualistic) art practice in this project. Therefore soon, we will hear terms such as 'radical holism' and my own 'idioholism' (in Chapter 7).

2. CFS-ME as an 'holistic' illness

As described in Chapter 2, the illness affects all the strata – physical, mental, even 'spiritual'³⁸ - of the sufferer: it does not confine itself to a knee or an eye. Every system in the body requires energy, and one might say this includes the psyche. Life itself requires energy. An illness where a consistent dip in energy is a *primary* symptom affects the 'whole' entity of what makes up a person going through it. This is why CFS-ME is more serious than initially seems. In some acute models of illness, the person may be able to function in life (albeit under the *threat* of their illness reappearing, e.g. post heart operation, post cancer-intervention). A friend of mine broke his back a decade ago. He was briefly paralysed. I was worried for him, but now, he can barely remember the event and is a prolific hill walker. At the same time another friend became bed-ridden with CFS-ME. Her 'less serious' bedridden existence continues, held captive by the condition across all of her body. Not only does she remember the experience, she is still living it, in every way.

With CFS-ME, some are reliably ill over the *whole* of their existence, which does not always threaten their life expectancy (it is an illness with extended chronicity) but does affect the physical, mental and social strata of the individual going through it. Of course, few people get through their entire lifespan without at least a hint of an extreme bug, accident, or more acutely, a hospital intervention that saves their life. But for these patients, this 'acute' spike of illness becomes a life-changing incident in

³⁸ Whilst not entirely comfortable with this term, it is perhaps safest to state that spiritual here is that which gives life purpose and meaning. We must include the term because it appears in reference to holism within complementary health care culture.

an otherwise recoverable life. ME sufferers have a constant life-retarding illness for as long as the condition persists.

ME/CFS (Myalgic Encephalomyelitis/Chronic Fatigue Syndrome) is a serious illness affecting several hundred thousand British people. Some 25% of people with ME/CFS may be severely ill (housebound or bedbound), sometimes for decades.

(Pheby and Saffron, 2009, n.p.)

For this 25% of CFS-ME sufferers, life is confined to a bed, or a room where a clear, focused thought can be as difficult as the physical problems of raising a limp arm or leg. In this situation, there can be no doubt that the quality of life for these sufferers is abysmal. This is the terrain of the suicidal CFS-ME sufferer, where body, mind and psyche are flattened. For a person in this situation, CFS-ME can be seen as an (w)holistic illness in regard to the life-strata it retards. Any creative response to CFS-ME is therefore likely to encounter the word 'holism' at some point and will need to be extremely adaptable and wide-ranging – yet energetically minimal.

3. The birth of the term 'holism'

Although examples like the Aristotelian reference at the start of this chapter have indicated that the historical hunger to unify parts and wholes has been a philosophical preoccupation for centuries, it was not until the 1920s that the word holism directly appeared in a text. Jan Christian Smuts (24 May 1870 – 11 September 1950) coined the term in 1925 (Holism and Evolution, Smuts, 1925). He used it to

describe a philosophical position that was directed towards an understanding of whole systems, rather than particular events or phenomena.

It is with some trepidation that the following quotes from Smuts are included due to an unpleasant aspect of Smuts' life. He held variable racist views, but he also coined the term, so there is little point omitting Smuts' contribution to the field. Smuts was a South African and British Commonwealth statesman and as well as being a military leader, he was also a philosopher. He was twice Prime Minister of the Union of South Africa from 1919-24 and from 1939-48. He was a supporter of racial segregation based on separate territory for blacks and whites³⁹ a view that was certainly mainstream at the time of his publication, but still raises ethical questions about separating the writing from the writer.

If we *can* isolate the text from the author (see footnote below) we can at least see observe the 'academic dawn' of twentieth century holism, at least etymologically. Overleaf, the following excerpt appears in the preface to the first edition *Holism and Evolution*, 1926:

³⁹ *Evolution and Philosophy*, whilst not quite in Hitler's *Mein Kampf* territory, or even explicitly racist is difficult to divorce from the context of Smuts' background. It is worth noting that ideas of purity and universality have not been excluded from the history of philosophy either. Philosopher Dr Michael Bakaoukas at The University of Piraeus, Greece wrote the paper *Were The Ancient Greeks Racists?* (http://www.erces.com/journal/articles/archives/v04/v04_03.htm - Bakaoukas, n.d., n.p.) In it, he attempts to forge a difficult trajectory through context in which philosophers forged their views – and both questions and contextualizes the degree that the ancient Greeks were 'proto-racists'

An attempt is made to show that this whole-making or holistic tendency is fundamental in nature, that it has a well-marked ascertainable character, and that Evolution is nothing but the gradual development and stratification of progressive series of wholes, stretching from the inorganic beginnings to the highest levels of spiritual creation.

(Smuts, 1926, preface)

Within two years, this new term had made its appearance in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* and was therein described as “a viewpoint additional and complementary to that of science” (*Encyclopaedia Britannica 1927, Holism and Science*). The first pertinent element in citing Smuts’ holism is that he sees holism not entirely as a thought-experiment, but as something more tangible:

Wholes are not mere artificial constructions of thought; they actually exist; they point to something real in the universe, and Holism is a real operative factor, a versa causa... (Smuts, 1926 p.88)

But he does not negate holism being part of cultural or conceptual ideas either:

The idea of wholes and wholeness should [therefore] not be confined to the biological domain; it covers both inorganic substances and mental structures as well as the highest manifestations of the human spirit.

(ibid)

In the following excerpt, we observe the first signs that holism could be a transferrable concept. Smuts talks of synthesising holism to our own ends – perhaps here lies one of the earliest clues that there will never be *one* clear holism but a series of them in different fields – whether we talk of the ‘radical cosmologies’ of artists (a useful term which I will elucidate towards the end of this chapter) or other self-contained systems of thought, Smuts here really broadens the scope and potential of holism into creative territory:

Holism is not only creative but self-creative, and its final structures are far more holistic than its initial structures. Natural wholes are always composed of parts; in fact the whole is not something additional to the parts, but is just the parts in their synthesis, which may be physico-chemical or organic or psychical or personal. As Holism is a process of creative synthesis, the resulting wholes are not static but dynamic, evolutionary, creative.

(Smuts, 1926 p.89)

A natural whole has its "field," and the concept of fields will be found most important in this connection also. Just as a "thing" is really a synthesised 'event' in the system of relativity, so an organism is really a unified, synthesised section of history, which includes not only its present but much of its past and even some of its future... ...the conception of the field therefore becomes necessary and will be found fruitful in biology and psychology no less than in physics. (ibid)

Had Smuts been working today, (outside of his debatable shortcomings as a kind person), he may well have found some of his ideas within the field of social anthropology, or sociology – or even the fringes of Western healthcare, which is where I will next turn my attention. But as we leave Smuts, we begin our journey of contextualising the research with some clear opening concepts of the field.

4. Holism and the encounter between western health and complementary health

Biomedicine is founded upon an historical pragmatism that has enabled the separation of fact from fancy, of the tangible from the tenuous. Acute care in hospital casualty wards requires immediate and skilled interventions, and not a reflective querying regarding the hidden causes or subtle meanings of a traumatic event. The flow of blood must be staunched. Broken tissues must be tended. Vital signs must be monitored. This is good and necessary. But the art of the healer extends beyond the casualty ward. And it is in such domains that less pressing realities such as the meaning and consequence of sickness episodes, a knowledge of the hidden dimensions of life, and a sensitivity to the subtle influences that condition our health become important. And this is why philosophy is inseparable from medicine.

(Di Stefano, 2006, p 7⁴⁰)

⁴⁰ Citation is from the sample chapter pdf of the printed edition. Both references of print and pdf are in the bibliography. The page number here is derived from the pdf version.

One might term this viewpoint as hierarchical, or as a hierarchical set of needs. Abraham Maslow (1908 – 1970) proposed that human desires are innately given and exist in an ascending hierarchy. Basic physiological needs – food, sleep, and protection from extreme hazards of the environment – must first be met. Then the needs for safety become paramount. Self esteem, love, self-respect can then be addressed. Following this comes a desire for order and a need for a kind of certainty and structure in our lives. Only then, can the more subtle needs of purpose and ‘self actualisation’ be met. One may look at Maslow’s model of needs and see them as a kind of ‘holistic triangle’ with the bottom as primal needs of survival being attended to – and the higher reaches being the pinnacle of one being true to one’s nature⁴¹. Maslow’s (frequently contested) model is not ‘complementary’ as such; rather, it appears to address more the order of urgency across one’s (whole) life. Maslow termed this holistic quest as ‘metamotivation’ (Goble, 1970, p.62).

From the 1960s onwards, the rise of ‘complementary health’ clinics began to pervade culture at large, often calling themselves ‘holistic centres’. One may link this phenomenon to the rise of a counter-culture and interest in non-Western forms of healthcare and the beginning of a questioning of authority, including that of the medical profession. Dissatisfaction with an industrial-scientific medical model, as illustrated for example in the work of artist Jo Spence (see Chapter 3 Artists in Extremis) is a good example of a patient taking matters into their own hands, eschewing the medical establishment, and rejecting the conventionally ‘passive’ role assigned to the patient.

⁴¹ Citation is based on page 506 of The Oxford Dictionary of Sociology (Scott, J & Marshall, G) Third edition revised 2009, Oxford

One clinic I visit in Edinburgh is called 'The Whole Works'. Given that 'holistic' has now become part of common healthcare parlance, it is still fair to say that there is surprising variability (and some might say liberal abandon) in the ways in which the word is used.

The complementary healthcare movement is where many of us first encounter the term 'holistic', 'wholism' or 'the whole person'. These encounters can often occur during desperate times when conventional health care fails us, so we may sample massage, acupuncture, meditation, homeopathy, and other market forces hoping to influence the sick, from floatation tank therapy right through to (the slightly commercial) end of Buddhism.

In the context of healthcare, the term 'holistic' is often used as a counter to more 'scientific/technical' models of health care. In the sympathetic side of complementary health care, there is much talk about 'caring for the whole person' that may be seen in opposition to western medical protocols. Those practising in western medicine may see themselves as part of professionals working together as an interdisciplinary team. Examples would be nurses, emergency medical technicians and paramedics, laboratory scientists, pharmacists, podiatrists, physiotherapists, respiratory therapists, speech therapists, occupational therapists, radiographers, dieticians, and bioengineers.

But what we see in the list above is not, in my opinion, *a team*, let alone an example of interdisciplinarity; it is a list of specialists. What would be needed is someone to co-ordinate that team. We have that in place, in the shape of one's

General Practitioner or G.P. (or primary specialist in hospital) – but there is little time for interdisciplinarity in meetings that last four to five minutes in the G.P.'s office or in a hospital conference room. Both the pressures of western medicine and that the budgetary concerns of NHS healthcare are rising which has resulted in G.P.s referring to straight to specialists, whom themselves *do not know the patient* outside of the notes, and even the notes only give a partial view.

A primary carer is normally expected to relate and unite the degree of interdisciplinarity between specialists, but in the real world what would happen is that the primary carer has an idea as to the origin of the problem and refers instead to the specialist (who may see the 'whole' world as related to their specialism). There isn't a formal mechanism for British healthcare in which a 'holist' 'directs' this team. Each specialist has an understanding of the basic principles of medicine outside their specialism. So instead of one director of the patient, who evaluates the specialists, we experience a series of encounters with specialists who see if they can find the root of the problem, and if not, they refer oneself back to the G.P. and the process begins again - then the G.P. may try a different tactic. In my own health this has meant there a) is little continuity of care and b) I myself end up as being the informed co-ordinator of these encounters. I end up giving an oral history of my illness. That itself causes further problems with some specialists suspecting hypochondria, because I seem to have made the daring decision of attempting to address my problems where the medical system has failed.

So although there exists a healthy list of disciplinary areas practitioners may be working within, this is in no way holistic. Just because there exists the departments,

one cannot infer there is a healthy dialogue between them. Moreover, the compartmentalisation of western healthcare results in the elevation of *the specialist* as the primary carer of someone with a given perhaps hospitalised condition. Within my community of CFS-ME patients, I see little true interdisciplinary cross over.

If I may dip back into an autoethnographic account I've not yet written about to illustrate this, in March 2014 my wife gave birth to our second child who was born with several problems, two club feet, hip dislocation, and crucially a small oral cavity and recessed chin. She stopped breathing once and was hospitalized for nearly three months. She also had stiff muscles and could not move her legs. In treating her, there seemed little evidence of a true interdisciplinary dialogue; she was routed 'around' the hospital (with, I concede, the occasional group meeting).

One might say there was a never a 'whole person' approach here. We were rarely allowed to these meetings, and we would often talk to the nurses in terms of 'who is in *charge* of her today?'. This extended and protracted lack of holism resulted in a stay in hospital which lasted over two months, much of which we feel could have been avoided. In addition, we felt that because the doctors couldn't find the root of her problem, we saw them frequently painting worst-case scenarios *when there was no evidence to back any of this up*.

Ivan Illich's *Limits to Medicine - Medical Nemesis – The Expropriation of Health* (Illich, 1976) describes and analyses the tensions not only between patients and doctors, but also between complementary health practitioners and healthcare professionals from mainstream western medicine. The following passage is particularly

pertinent to this, and includes a term which is particularly resonant with this research project, that 'medicalisation' negates 'an art of suffering' that was previously present in some societies.

Illich writes about the removal of systems of coping with the inevitabilities of life in indigenous cultures by westernized medicine.

Wherever in the world a culture is medicalised, the traditional framework for habits that can be become conscious in the personal practice of the virtue of hygiene is progressively trammelled by a mechanical system, a medical code by which individuals submit to the instructions emanating from hygienic custodians. Medicalisation constitutes a prolific bureaucratic program based on the denial of each man's need to deal with pain, sickness, and death. The modern medical enterprise represents an endeavour to do for people what their genetic and cultural heritage formerly equipped them to do for themselves. Medical civilization is planned and organized to kill pain, to eliminate sickness, and to abolish the need for an art of suffering and of dying. This performance flattening out of personal, virtuous performance constitutes a new goal which has never before been guidance for social life. Suffering, healing, and dying which are essentially intransitive activities that culture taught each man, are now claimed by technocracy as new areas of policy making and are treated as malfunctions from which populations ought to be institutionally relieved. The goals of metropolitan medical civilization are thus in opposition to every single

cultural health program the encounter in the process of progressive colonization.

(Illich, 1976, pp.131-132)

In the light of Illich's critique, one may stop for a moment and question what is being lost in medicine. Advances in medical technology are collectively seen as a creative aspect of human endeavour *par excellence*: but are we losing the ability to be creative in the first-person? Are we losing our innate philosophical strategies because medical technology is advancing at a rapid pace? Whilst few would suggest we retard such technological advances, nor suggest either that we flush our medications down the toilet, Illich is arguing that the wider medical framework is displacing cultures that promote wellbeing from the clutches of society, especially in regard to diseases for which there is not 'part' available (or terminal illnesses). Instead, medicalisation defers this control to an increasingly compartmentalised and poorly integrated system of healthcare.

Illich highlights a critical discourse that revolves around poor communication in healthcare contexts: the lost arts of collaboration, of neighbourliness and crucially, the loss of *creativity* to cope in extremis. With this in mind should we not be arguing for a complementary and integrated culture, even as Illich frames it, an 'art of suffering' to help us cope with such cataclysms? One may risk romanticising societies without funded health care programmes and excuse the slashing of our healthcare budgets to permit this point of view, but what of our own ancestral tradition of coping? One does not have to go far back to find a day when common illnesses wiped out huge numbers of the populace. Surely the combination of our medical technology *alongside* an

equally progressive listening ear for such strategies outside the hospital could be a definition of holistic health care.

5. Criticising holism within the complementary health encounter

The current interest in holistic medicine and alternative healing systems seems best explained as a historically derived populist movement that is perhaps rightly viewed by the medical establishment as anti-professional.

(Salmon 1984, p.156)

Holism as experienced in complementary health care alongside the term 'holistic' is a contested term and/or field. Some argue it is not a field at all. In the journal *Skeptical Enquirer* from 2002, John Ruscio (Professor of Psychology, the College of New Jersey) warns us of the 'emptiness' of holism:

An old psychological controversy concerning the relative merits of clinical and statistical prediction has direct implications for modern-day beliefs in "holism." The notion that one should not consider individual factors, but rather a complex whole is frustratingly vague and incompatible with all that we have learned about human cognitive limitations and judgmental biases. Despite its seeming compassion, the mantra of holism may constitute empty rhetoric that shields its

proponents from the hard work of discovering, assessing, and validly integrating meaningful information.

(Ruscio, 2002, p.46)

Specifically, he highlights holistic health:

Holism has achieved a considerable following among some health care professions (we now have self-styled holistic healers, holistic veterinarians, holistic nurses, and others) and believers in paranormal phenomena (witness modern astrology's insistence on the use of the "whole chart") despite a highly questionable rationale and virtually no empirical support. Proponents of holism espouse vague, ill-defined practices that require psychologically impossible feats of judgment. In this sense, holism provides a facade of compassion behind which the idiosyncratic, free-for-all approaches of its practitioners are shielded from sceptical scrutiny.

(ibid, p.47)

One may agree that of the opportunistic nature of anyone calling himself or herself a holistic healer needs to be criticised. However, I would take issue with some of the slightly inappropriate attacks on 'holistic nurses' being used in the same sentence as paranormal phenomena. It may be that these nurses are practising 'patient-centred care' which simply means they do not just treat the body like an engine, evaluating instead other aspects of the patient's life. Murdoch and Denz-

Penhey in *Chronic Fatigue Syndrome, a Patient-Centred Approach*, describe CFS-ME thus in the chapter 'Understanding the whole person':

CFS has been described as an "equal-opportunity disorder" ... here, ...[if people are] characterised more by symptoms, suffering and disability than by consistently demonstrable tissue abnormality, then the way forward is individual care with particular emphasis on understanding the whole person and helping to prevent further disability.

(Murdoch and Denz-Penhey, 2002, p.95)

Reading Ruscio's views in this light, one may not care whether one's physician is espousing 'empty rhetoric' if they are effectively treating the 'whole' person. Moreover this 'patient-centeredness' is a widespread healthcare orthodoxy these days, but of course is experienced extremely variably by service users. There have been, however, attempts to unify the needs of the self and institutions, in, for example, the writings of philosopher and musician Donald Schön who introduced and popularised the term 'reflective practice':

Donald Schön made a remarkable contribution to our understanding of the theory and practice of learning. His innovative thinking around notions such as 'the learning society', 'double-loop learning' and 'reflection-in-action' has become part of the language of education."

(Smith, 2013, n.p.)

Here Schön speaks about of how orthodoxies must be flexible or dynamic to function:

A learning system... must be one in which dynamic conservatism operates at such a level and in such a way as to permit change of state without intolerable threat to the essential functions the system fulfils for the self. Our systems need to maintain their identity, and their ability to support the self-identity of those who belong to them, but they must at the same time be capable of transforming themselves.

(Schön 1973, p.57)

We can infer from this approach that medicine and healthcare is at least as much a philosophical enterprise as it is a scientific system, although one may hazard a guess that many western industrial-scientific practitioners might strongly argue for the separation of philosophy from medicine. In *Holism and Complementary Medicine*, (Di Stefano, 2006) - an examination of the key practice issues and holistic principles in today's health system (which flags both the therapeutic benefits and tensions between these two supposedly 'separate' fields - Di Stefano reminded us 'the art of the healer extends beyond the casualty ward' (Di Stefano 2006, p.7⁴²). The challenge to western industrial scientific medicine comes from many quarters, not least from the medical humanities, and high quality care in complementary medicine. In such places:

...less pressing realities such as the meaning and consequence of sickness episodes, knowledge of the hidden dimensions of life, and

⁴² The page number is derived from the online source, a publicly available first chapter of the book. This may differ from the page number in the printed edition.

sensitivity to the subtle influences that condition our health become important. And this is why philosophy is inseparable from medicine.
(ibid, p.7)

Returning to Ruscio, who may contest whether holistic approaches can work cognitively: “holists over estimate the extent to which people can validly combine information in their heads” (Ruscio, 2002, p49). He continues to infer that holists perhaps use a form of lazy rhetoric to validate what he seems to regard as pseudo-sciences (such as astrology which is logically deconstructed in the essay) despite the “overwhelming evidence to the contrary” (ibid.)

6. John Clark’s Social Ecology and investigation of holism

Some writers comment on the holistic vision, and perhaps still find holism an apt methodology, but as hinted earlier, place caveats within their commentaries of holism. John Clark, in his *A Social Ecology* (Clark, 1997) (Ch 2, *A Dialectical Holism*) highlights the value of parts and wholes as non-hierarchical:

Questions are [also] raised about the totalising implications of holism. Critics of holism sometimes identify it with an extreme organicism that denies the significance, reality, or the value of the parts. It is important therefore to understand that «holism» does not refer exclusively to a view in which the whole is ontologically prior to the part, more metaphysically real than the part, or deserving of more moral

consideration than the part. In fact, a dialectical holism rejects the idea that the being, reality or value of the parts can be distinguished from that of the whole in the manner presupposed by such a critique.

(Clark, 1997, p.11)

The growing tradition Clark writes from is 'social ecology', which springs from the work of the political philosopher, anarchist and ecological thinker Murray Bookchin (1921-2006). It is also drawn from a tradition of compassion. Social ecologists can be seen as exemplars of those who wish to protect society from rhetoric which seems to undermine social inclusion and that which fractures society, whether that is 'scientific racism' or humanity attacking the earth as a whole (e.g. climate change deniers and so on). But what is social ecology?

The Institute for Social Ecology, a prominent centre in the United States for research and teaching based on the writings of Bookchin, defines social ecology as:

1: a coherent radical critique of current social, political, and anti-ecological trends.

2: a reconstructive, ecological, communitarian, and ethical approach to society.

(Institute for Social Ecology, 2014, n.d. / n.p.)

Social ecologists do not just oppose current threats to our planet and/or society, or champion the recent 'Occupy' movement. There is a growing academic literature that underpins the activism and sustainability of social ecology. There is also a countercultural aspect to social ecology that is enticing. The reason this is relevant to the use of the term holism in this text, is that such countercultural dialogues may *also help situate artists' projects* such as mine within this cultural and political sphere, and, by extension, in the philosophical debates in the medical humanities and arts and health field.

Clark discusses both sociologic possibilities and planetary evolution as a holistic process. He sees ecosystems in both societal constructs (i.e. communities) and conventional ideas of ecosystems as 'complex, developing wholes'. He finds social ecology 'to be rooted in the most basic levels of being' – and describes holism thus:

Holism does not mean the fetishisation of some particular kind of whole, which would constitute a version of the fallacy of misplaced concreteness, but rather an exploration of the meaning of many kinds of wholeness that appear in many ways and on many levels within developing unity-in-diversity.

(A Social Ecology, Clark, 1997, n.d.)

7a. Gideon Kossoff's 'Radical Holism'

Dr Gideon Kossoff is a theorist who has developed the term 'transition design', an emerging field of societal planning rooted in social ecology with a focus on how to make the transition to a more sustainable future. Kossoff has referred to the work of Clark (above) and trained partly at Schumacher College – an institution where one can study for a (rare) MSc in Holistic Science, and the Centre for Natural Design at Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art and Design at the University of Dundee.

What follows are excerpts and commentary from Kossoff's University of Dundee doctoral text *Holism and the Reconstitution of Everyday Life a Framework for Transition to a Sustainable Society*: (2011 pp.113-133) followed by field notes, transcriptions and commentary from an interview with the author.

Kossoff coins the term 'radical holism' to "describe a tradition of anti-authoritarian thought which in various ways is grounded in 'ecology', 'whole systems', 'holism/organicism or 'nature'. (p.113) Under this banner, 'radical holists' come with several different monikers—anarchists, social ecologists, libertarians, communalists, anti-authoritarian socialists..." (p.114) – One may reflect if some contemporary artists might be located under this banner because they are frequently anti-authoritarian and anarchic in outlook.

Then, Kossoff hints of a paradox of holistic thought: holism is often assumed to be a reaction to the mainstream, atomised and scientific-technical views of the world

that dominate political discourse, but 'It is remarkable how often various forms of holism sit in the background or foreground of anti-authoritarian thinking, which is paradoxical given the tendency of holism to be used to justify conservative or authoritarian ideologies.' (p.114) As others have prefixed or supplemented holism with caveats – or augmented the term holism, Kossoff here prefixes holism with 'authentic' – maintaining that 'authentic' holism is where human affairs 'is clearly progressive and can become the basis for a holistic framework for transition to a sustainable society'. (p.114). Of course 'authentic' is also a highly contested term, but Kossoff uses it to imply a version of holism underpinned by humanistic and egalitarian values.

If artists often take matters into their own hands, as I have hinted in earlier chapters, so then do 'radical holists', who 'in common with most anti-authoritarians, argue that social, cultural, political and economic forms arise, if permitted, from within the communities in which they are located through the self-organised activities of their inhabitants'. (p.115) The concept of care is also not excluded from this model. Kossoff states that "Murray Bookchin shows how early human communities were "organic" unities that were "spontaneously formed, non-coercive and egalitarian...[they] emerged from innate human needs for consociation, interdependence and care". (p.116).

Wholeness out of disruption?

The nature of catastrophe has been an aspect of my own doctoral enquiry. In one of the symposia presentations for this project I stated that '*predicament* had co-authored the work.' Can catastrophe too, be an enlightening factor in how people self-govern and organise?

Kossoff cites cultural geographer Rebecca Solnit's book *A Paradise Built in Hell*, (Solnit, 2009) where the author makes the case that people behave in similar ways during the chaos of disasters, such as the 1906 San Francisco Earthquake or in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, when ordinary life is suspended and the institutions which preside over it are powerless. We are given, she says,

...a view into another world": the unsolicited assistance, resourcefulness and generosity that typically characterizes such events shows us who we really are, what we really desire and what is really possible. She is not describing the actions of a revolutionary cadre, radical activists or a disgruntled populace, but those of random people in very difficult or tragic circumstances who have been taken by surprise by events and who take matters in their own hands without being directed by any external authorities...

(Solnit, 2009 pp.116-117)

In this chapter from Kossoff's doctoral thesis the central message is that authentic social wholeness...

...is created when intrinsically related individuals and communities mutually participate in bringing into being the social wholes to which they belong. The social, cultural and psychological diversity that radical holists have advocated would develop through such processes since social parts are seen as different but related expressions of such social wholes. (p.133)

Working with these kinds of definitions, we are getting closer to a holism that mirrors my own idiosyncratic needs to design an inclusive and adaptable holism. The above excerpts from Kossoff's doctoral text offer an insight into what he has defined as 'radical' or 'authentic' holism. But as an artist, who is working with metaphors and objects, I wondered if Kossoff could expand on this social wholeness, perhaps with examples from the cultural world, or even the natural world. My project is primarily *cultural* in the sense that it is located in the arts. How does one understand the apparent schism between whole and part in terms of art projects, or for example, music? Is that possible? What part does imagination play here?

What results in the section below is a brief summary from meeting Kossoff at the University of the West of Scotland in 2012 (I have removed my questions from the answers). These are direct quotes from my recorded material, edited from a one-hour conversation.

7b. Gideon Kossoff - interview responses, early 2012:

Henri Bortoft in 'The Wholeness of Nature' (Bortoft, 1996) highlights that the way we think about wholeness is usually wrong because of our linear thinking. We think of 'whole' and 'part' as two distinct things rather than whole or part as simultaneously manifesting.

Here, the whole is revealed as dynamic and temporal. Think of a plant. The plant comes into being over time. The stamen, the leaves, the flower, the roots, the fruit, everything one after the other over a year or whatever, so the whole is no one thing. You can't put your hands on the whole; the whole is 'the absent whole' as Bortoft calls it, expressing itself through each of those different parts. So it's nothing you can see, it's nothing you can put your hands on. The only access you have to it is through your imagination because it's never there, it's absent. It just expresses itself in different ways through each of the parts.

So the only way you can come to understand the whole is by delving into the parts, by dwelling in the parts, by looking at the leaf, by looking at the flower and coming to understand them as metamorphosed expressions of a unified but absent whole - and the only access you have to that is through your imagination.

Think of the horse family, you've got the zebra, the horse, the gazelle, the bison. They all emphasise different aspects of this idea of horse.

If you think about a jazz performance there might be an underlying melody but there are multiple expressions of it. Where is the melody? It doesn't exist, it only exists in the minds of the musicians and so all the different performances, the sorts of particular melody are the unity, the melody is the multiplicity, the performers themselves are like the dynamic, as they perform they're like the equivalent to the dynamic unfolding of the plant, they are the parts. They are the parts within the whole, metamorphic variations on a theme literally...and [this is seen] *in jazz and jazz improvisation*. (Field notes, Dooks 2012)

So how may I respond to this in the context of my own project?

There is a critical lesson that Kossoff expounds above: that holism "...is nothing you can see, it's nothing you can put your hands on. The only access you have to it is through your imagination because it's never there, it's absent. It just expresses itself in different ways through each of the parts."

This is a liberating statement for anyone encountering holism usefully - even imaginatively - for it appears true and imaginative at the same time and for the artist,

serves as reinforcement that permits the use of the word. More relevantly, my holism has been born out of *practice*. It had to be carried out in parts, and whilst I had an eye for an overview and saw the projects initially as separate entities, I thought my project was one in which areas of life were ticked off very separately in my red record and the blue and yellow sequels to it.

Instead, when I look at my work retrospectively, I see how variations and different weights or emphases on the same essential problem of creating a richer view of the world emanate from limited means. It requires the listener to work with the objects that I have produced, to complete my idiosyncratic ‘holistic vision of exhaustion.’ The listener, it seems *may complete the holistic act* in this research project, in ways that I couldn’t predict. Moreover, the part and whole are inextricably linked in the work. This surprised me. Any one of the tracks, without its larger context, needs some explaining when removed from the rest of the work. But it shouldn’t surprise me when I have described the work as ‘fragmented films’ – because when one removes an element of a film away, or uses that element in an isolated manner, as I demonstrated in Chapter 4, apart the ‘whole’ of the film, the spell becomes broken. Here the listener serves as holist to reunite and reinterpret the vision.

Kossoff is usefully using the metaphor of jazz (and horses) to show that our conception of both jazz (and horses) is an interpretive view. Instead we have to imagine multiple interpretations of a musical number (or a horse) to locate where the ‘holistic’ or even ‘objective’ view of these concepts lies.

8. Tarnass and *The Passion of The Western Mind*

So far, we are discovering there is no single 'holistic' viewpoint in critical thinking. But holism is still very useful shorthand to describe a project like *The Idioholism Vinyl Trilogy* that is a kind of self-contained entity, which through triangulated methods, seeks to improve the breadth of life for someone whose illness appears all encompassing. I hope that it offers an artistic, practice-based, creative contribution to the canonical literature and culture of holism.

One aspect is key here; from Aristotle to social ecology, to current debates about the word, I reiterate that holism needs to be strongly contextually defined if used, and how it is used.

I close this chapter by commenting on excerpts from *The Passion of The Western Mind* (Tarnass, 1996), a philosophical history of cross-currents in Western thought, because it serves to lead us from holism and world-views in the context of the cultural world at large, which artists are part of. At the same time the author provides a background that may bring into a more conclusive focus those present day practitioners who define themselves as working in 'holistic frameworks.' The author also brings us back to the start of holistic thought by reminding us of the ideas of the Ancient Egyptians and Greeks.

Tarnass, when discussing holism, outlines the value of creating experiential philosophical paradigms. He discusses (Tarnass, 1996, pp.439-440) the emergence of

such paradigms being more than '*logical reasoning from the observed data*' (p.439, referring to the breakthroughs of philosophers from Plato, Aquinas or Kant to Heidegger). He infers that such paradigms by their nature must include that which is experiential. Tarnass argues that, in philosophy, metaphysical perspectives and their epistemologies (historically) have reflected "...the emergence of a global experiential gestalt that informs that philosopher's vision, that governs his or her reasoning or observations, and that ultimately affects the entire cultural and sociological context within which the philosopher's vision is taking form." (Tarnass, 1996, p.439)

Gestalt is a German word for form or shape: or "pattern, organised whole" (Blackburn 2008, p.151). It is used in English to refer to aspects of holism. A 'world-view' could be a gestalt. How do such 'global experiential gestalts arise? Tarnass argues that they arise out of discoveries such as the Copernican revolution, which partly gave birth to modern rationality 'out of the ancient medieval cosmic-ecclesiastical womb' (Tarnass 1996, p.439). In doing so, he deduces that a new world-view's appearance is relational to the 'archetypal dynamic' of the larger culture, either by supporting the status quo or by tearing it down.

He goes on to suggest that during the twentieth century, society experienced the radical breakdown of so many of its established, taken-for-granted structures, from previous secure strongholds of political, religious and scientific establishments into more fractured and unstable truths. When such entities broke down (in regard at least to the *Western Mind* of his title) from a singular, overarching world-view into our current 'collective' branches of society, Tarnass implies, in all of these branches we re-arrive at 'an impetus to articulate a holistic and participatory world view.' He implies

that it is our unavoidable nature to do this. He asks why is it is such an impulse, and a constantly growing phenomena that the 'collective psyche seems to be in the grip of a powerful archetypal dynamic?' Is it just human nature to want to sort phenomena into meaningful configurations? He sees this as a repeating pattern, rather than a conscious, overt yearning:

...we can recognize a multiplicity of these archetypal sequences, with each scientific revolution, each change of worldview; yet perhaps we can also recognise one overall archetypal dynamic in the evolution of human consciousness that subsumes all of these smaller sequences, one long metatrajectory...

(Tarnass, 1996, p.440)

Earlier in the book (p.357), Tarnass explains that 'corrections' in science and the recent challenging of classical physics offer apparent paradoxes, rocking the idea of previously stable holistic visions. He uses the example in quantum mechanics of waves being interchangeable with particles, and the apparent simultaneous duality and unity of thought that this suggests. By breaking down atoms into their smallest observable parts, science has *not* revealed the whole vision of the universe, instead merely pitted it against previous goals of a single universal theory. Rather than this being a problem, in terms of how the universe may work, perhaps we could argue, albeit conjecturally, that systems of holism are simply adequate for the task *only at the time they appear* from. After all, holism in largest sense of the word is surely about universality – and when new discoveries are made (about the universe) we have to adjust not only our

theories but also broach the possibility of paradigmatic shockwaves and pluralities. He phrases this conundrum thus:

...the quantum-relativistic revolution represented an unexpected and welcome broaching of new intellectual possibilities.

(ibid, p.357)

Put another way, perhaps it is that we may need to investigate many *holisms* as opposed to a grand unifying theory. Moreover, anyone expounding holism must also say something about reductionism – the points where the smallest measurable components of the world in the context of holism are illustrated.

...The deep interconnectedness of phenomena encouraged a new holistic thinking about the world, with many social, moral and religious implications. Increasing numbers of scientists began to question modern science's pervasive, if often unconscious, assumption that the intellectual effort to reduce all reality to the smallest measurable components of the physical world would eventually reveal that which is most fundamental in the universe.

(ibid, p.357)

Tarnass outlines that historically, the discoveries we've briefly outlined did not immediately filter through to other comparable theoretical transformations in the natural sciences and social sciences - these areas being based largely on the

‘mechanistic principles of classical physics’ (ibid p.357) - but argued that many felt the old materialistic and fragmented worldview had been irrevocably challenged.

9. Making the world strange

One of the emerging world views that Tarnass goes on to highlight was a ‘new aesthetic logic’ in modern Western thought – that of artists - tearing down the past and to reveal that they could ‘make the world strange (Tarnass, 1996, p391)’. This is the tradition that, to an extent, *The Idioholism Vinyl Trilogy* finds itself located in.

‘Each artist had become the prophet of his new order and dispensation,
courageously breaking the old law and forming a new testament’
(ibid, p.391)

The above sentence can illustrate art movements over time and in the current ‘postmodern’ mélange of artists vying to ‘make the world strange’ on their own terms and with their disparate worldviews.

In terms of large, defining art movements, it is held that they arise in response to those movements that preceded them. Foundation art students examining the Western traditions are taught to observe the ideas of the Ancient Egyptians and Greeks and follow the evolutions from the classical art period, followed by the Byzantine movement, the Renaissance and world-views that accompanied it before the arrival of Baroque and Romanticism movements. And it is part of Western art

history to then include Modernism, Post-Modernism and the multifarious and niche-driven movements of the present day, if we can define them yet.

A key point in Tarnass's writing is that these movements were not fixed or stable. This influences an aspect of holism. Tarnass' '*whole*' appears to be *dynamic*. If we freeze time, we define the 'whole' subjectively - but only at that time of what life is reacting *to*, or dwelling *in* – the times in which its cultures and discourses are created. The author suggests that holism is not a fixed phenomenon in terms of human awareness, that we are instead shifting in space, in time and regarding or ideas, that the shape of things, the 'gestalt' is dynamic and perhaps even creative.

10. The radical cosmologies of artists

The Cosmos is all that ever was or ever will be.

(Sagan, 1980, p.4)

In this section I would like to trace how the terms 'cosmology' / 'cosmologies' are being used in creative ways as types of holistic enterprises and that such 'cosmologies' are packages of integrated ideas being used by artists and critical thinkers in the arts. Let us look first at the prefix 'cosmos.'

A creative description of the term 'cosmos' also appears in the television programme of the same name delivered by Carl Sagan:

If you wish to make an apple pie from scratch,

You must first, invent the universe.

(Cosmos episode 9 - The Lives of The Stars, 2009)

The term 'Cosmos' had long been 'owned' by science, (Greek; 'order'⁴³) which included the philosophical realm. The scientist Carl Sagan (1934 – 1996) may be seen as an exemplar of a professor⁴⁴ who used accessible metaphors and aphorisms in his work. In doing so, Sagan, though not exactly a philosopher, was instrumental in the framing of the term 'cosmos' in creative and existential ways in the 1980s – such as the much-cited apple pie example above. Sagan was prepared to create metaphors that were poetic and populist in his television programmes, books and lectures.

The related term '*cosmologies*' then, initially seems a paradox when 'cosmos' implies *everything*. But one may interpret that '*cosmologies*' means *everything's*. The term 'cosmologies' can be therefore be applied to individual disciplines of 'cosmology' – such as differing accounts for the creation of the universe; anthropological, scientific, religious and so on.

Science by its nature develops opposing narratives – e.g. between theories of one cosmos or multiple ones, and we now see more of a convergence between the arts and sciences – sometimes in so-called 'sci-art'⁴⁵. In critical theory, we may,

⁴³ (Oxfordreference.com, 2014)

⁴⁴ Professor of Astronomy at Cornell University – source <http://www.news.cornell.edu/stories/1996/12/carl-sagan-cornell-astronomer-dies-today-dec-20-seattle>

⁴⁵ Sci-Art or *Sciart* is a term I first saw in the context of the Wellcome Trust in the late nineties: "In 1996, the Wellcome Trust launched the Sciart funding programme in response to a growing field of artists embarking on interdisciplinary practice in conjunction with scientists" in *Insight and Exchange: An evaluation of the Wellcome*

likewise, argue for holisms as opposed to one holism, which must be defined in a given context to avoid being contentious. Such contextualisation is now being applied to equally self-contained worlds as 'cosmologies' – especially for those labyrinthine or complex cultural worlds created in writing and other artforms. In regard to this project, the large-scale nature of the vinyl trilogy produced could possibly be considered a kind of first-person cosmology. I am interested therefore, in 'artists cosmologies.'

In literature we can take an example like Italo Calvino's *The Complete Cosmicomics* - (Calvino, 2010). First published as short stories in 1969, Calvino's stories about the evolution of the universe in first-person characters are fashioned from cellular structures and mathematical formulae. In these idiosyncratic narratives, the reader inhabits planets, moons, sub-atomic particles and even dinosaurs. What is interesting about this book is that it was written in small individual narratives, and then 'contained' as a collection: a modular bricolage-like process that became a literary 'cosmology' in its own right.

Moving to the internet age, and questioning traditional definitions of what defines a cosmology, Viralnet.net began a series of discourses in 2011 looking at the interplay between the cultural understanding of 'cosmologies' i.e. that of cosmology in regard to the study of the universe – against a backdrop of the divergent interests and trajectories of artists and thinkers under the banner 'Radical Cosmologies'. The following statement is from the project's home page:

During 2011-12, Viralnet.net and guest artist and curator, Lea Rekow, will invite writers, artists, scientists, performers, and scholars to collaborate on the theme of Radical Cosmologies... Our project marks a significant creative departure from traditional and scientific notions of cosmology. We plan to explore a wide range of contemporary artist's perspectives and practices around the cultural, educational and creative possibilities of what a Radical Cosmology could look like. Our intention is to offer the viewer fresh interpretations of cultural narratives presented in the form of experimental and unique interdisciplinary inquiries. These creative inquiries will look at the universe and our place in it, and will emphasize the synthesis of alternative technologies and creative experimentation.

(Leeser, Bassett and Calkin, 2014, n.p.)

The *Radical Cosmologies* project profiles the work of several artists working either directly on themes of the human relationship with space directly, such as conceptualising outer space, mapping, visualising data and so on, but also leaves the discourse open wide enough for themes such as memory as an entity / construct or more idiosyncratically, the grouping together of one's possessions as a kind of 'idiosyncratic cosmology' – such as in the work of Mary Mattingly's 'House and Universe' series⁴⁶. This example sees the artist constructing several photographic tableaux (based on performances) of the artist's wrapped possessions and other related objects; in graves, around rocks, pulled along a street, and lying on a human form, literally contained by sheets of tarpaulin and twine. One may argue, that in this light, three interrelated vinyl

⁴⁶ <http://www.marymattingly.com/html/MATTINGLYHouseUniverse.html>

records is as idiosyncratic a take on the idea of the cosmologies of artists.

The word cosmologies in relation to the arts also features in various art shows and symposia such as Cornell Council of The Arts 2014 *Intimate Cosmologies* biennial, which is centred on 'the aesthetics of scale'⁴⁷.

[CCA Director Stephanie Owens said]

Scientists are suddenly designers creating new forms... And artists are increasingly interested in how things are structured, down to the biological level. Both are designing and discovering new ways of synthesizing natural properties of the material world with the fabricated experiences that extend and express the impact of these properties on our lives.

(Aloi, 2014, n.p.)

When gathered systems of thought and artistic practice are played out in the cultural world, we may tentatively term these experiments as potential 'cosmologies'. And we may say that these cosmologies may also be potential 'enterprises of holism' or 'holistic experiments'. Such enquiries could serve as both complementary and counter narratives to the labyrinthine bodies of thought revolving around types of totality, i.e. around the cosmos, or one's personal cosmos, with the caveat that an individual artist working within such broad and encompassing words and worlds, who develops their own 'cosmology' outside of the purely scientific model is experimental, or occasionally incredulous, satirical or unorthodox. But at the same time, working

⁴⁷ <http://www.news.cornell.edu/stories/2013/12/2014-biennial-explore-nanotech-artistic-medium>

within such terms may also be an attempt at integrating and connecting systems of thought and art practice as much as possible.

11. The new testaments of artists? Concluding thoughts

If we return to Tarnass' suggestion that 'each artist had become the prophet of his new order and dispensation, courageously breaking the old law and forming a new testament' (Tarnass, 1996, p357) we uncover many contemporary examples of individual artists creating their own 'cosmologies', or self-contained worlds. One example of this is the history of the *artist manifesto* as a self-contained document to outline idiosyncratic worldviews and novel methodologies.

Worldviews of artists, to quote Alex Danchev in *100 Artists' Manifestos* (Penguin, 2011) are:

...self-differentiating. Artists' movements and artists' manifestos typically define themselves *against*..
(Danchev, 2011, introduction, p.ixv).

This 'against' could mean either against the accepted view or against each other and for or against holism in the art world. Whole worlds can be optimistically created or destroyed in this ideological playground, although in Danchev's book, many artist manifestos emphasise change and are utopian constructions. There are many contemporary examples of this, for example in Bill Drummond's numerous visions of a rebellious utopia in his manifestos, from his anti-Turner Prize rhetoric (O'Neill, 2005),

or his 'not listening to recorded music for a given time' ('17' - Drummond, 2008).

Drummond is a prolific manifesto-writer and maker, fond of heavy typefaces, drama and grand statements. Here is 'poster 59', a statement which became a collection of manifestos charting a Drummond choral project.

NOTICE

ALL RECORDED MUSIC HAS RUN ITS COURSE.

IT HAS ALL BEEN CONSUMED, TRADED, DOWNLOADED,
UNDERSTOOD, HEARD BEFORE, SAMPLED, LEARNED, REVIVED,
JUDGED AND FOUND WANTING...

...The17 IS A CHOIR ...The17 HAS MANY VOICES ...THEY USE NO
LIBRETTO, LYRICS OR WORDS; NO TIME SIGNATURES, RHYTHM
OR BEATS; AND HAVE NO KNOWLEDGE OF MELODY,
CONTERPOINT OR HARMONY.

(Drummond, 2008, p.3)

This text is part of a group of statements or manifestos that become reflexive over a given period of time. As Drummond mounts a tirade against making new recorded music over several years, and focusing instead on the practice and anti-documentation of sound, there is a constant drama and revision to the texts as they unfold into a narrative that does get documented, but as a book. Treated as a whole, the book is a singular utopian vision, with the statements forming individual stems of an integrated point of view, a potential kind of idiosyncratic holism.

Another interesting manifesto that we may look at is 'The Stuckists' resolutely nostalgic view of what constitutes art (and life). 'The Stuckist Manifesto' (Childish and Thomson, in Danchev, 2011, p425) owes its existence to a well-known contemporary artist and is a useful manifesto to use because it uses the term 'holistic':

Their name derives from an outburst by Tracey Emin... directed at her ex-boyfriend Billy Childish 'Your paintings are stuck, you are stuck! Stuck! Stuck! Stuck!'
(in Danchev, 2011, p.425)

The manifesto in question takes a rebellious and yet traditional stance at the same time arguing against 'conceptualism, hedonism and the cult of the ego-artist' (in Danchev, p.426) and it sees the work of 'stuckism' as holistic:

3. Stuckism proposes a model of art which is holistic. It is a meeting of the conscious and unconscious, thought and emotion, spiritual and material, private and public. Modernism is a school of fragmentation – one aspect of art is isolated and exaggerated to the detriment of the whole. This is a fundamental distortion of the human experience and perpetuates an egocentric lie.

(Childish and Thomson, in Danchev, 2011, p.427)

Even just from these two examples, we can see then there can be a multiplicity or '*metatrajectories*' of very firm points of view between artists – one of constant revision as in Drummond's case – as opposed to the literally stuck 'world' of "The

Stuckists'. Whether static or dynamic, these points of view have been created in small bursts, forming a world view. Whether that worldview is looking outward or inward is a matter for the individual manifesto-ists to discern, but it is not overstressing the argument to say that these are examples of a kind of holism in contemporary art. We can certainly use the term 'world view' if holism is semantically problematic. At the very least, artist manifestos can be seen as related to a kind of holism, from the desire to express self contained worlds. This means that I can validly place my 'holistic' project within contemporary art practice. Of course manifestos are not confined to artists (or famously, communists). But artists do create their own worlds, and a sense of 'enclosed wholes', sometimes unconsciously.

Concluding thoughts

This chapter has attempted to map the field of holism, and track it as it continues to explode along such terrain which one struggles to keep up with, and in no singular 'holistic vision'. Holism seems to be exploding along *metatrajectorial* and diverse academic territories and geographies. There is no single holism, semantic, methodological, spiritual and so on. But instead of a fear that no solid universal point of view exists in which we can protect our foundations on – there may lay opportunities for that which is individualistic, that which is idiosyncratic, and born from necessity.

This is my sole reason for pursuing holism as a word, shorthand and a symbol that may then be suffixed in the traditions we have seen in this chapter. We have seen how thinkers and those who need to augment holism with their own contexts may

legitimately do so. It is in this light in which I may now similarly augment holism in such a way that it can be contextualised in my own tradition, that of art practice, of underpinning an idiosyncratic methodology with practical ends. This is the purpose of the following chapter: the development of the word to be used from an artistic and individualistic point of view, that of *idio*-holism.

Chapter 7

Idioholism: an artist's intervention

1. Introduction: *The One Minute Manifesto of the Exhausted Artist*
2. The idio
3. A short survey of *idios kosmos*
4. Existing idioholistic publications?
5. The transferability of the project's principles
6. Conclusion and *The Ten Minute Manifesto of Idioholism*

1. Introduction: The one minute manifesto of the exhausted artist

In this chapter, alongside the sleeve notes to the three records (in Chapter 8) I unpack and elaborate on the metaphors that I use to describe and comment on the situation – perhaps even ‘predicament’ - that I find myself in. These approaches are connected together by the term I have developed to contain them: *idioholism*.

The research project began with an artist manifesto, in both a written and audio version. Alongside several other manifestos, it was ‘performed’ (or rather played back, as I was too sick to attend) at a symposium on the artist-manifesto in Dundee in 2012. I intentionally limited the time in which the manifesto could be read to approximately one minute, so that people with an exhaustion-related condition could read any statement of principle in connection with this research project. The manifesto is presented here, and by the end of the chapter, the latest incarnation of it will be refined. Between these two manifestos, I attempt to validate the term ‘idioholism’. In doing so, I will be outlining a conceptual response to some of the theoretical and philosophical issues which we have mapped thus far.

The One Minute Manifesto of The Exhausted Artist v.1

Chris Dooks, 2012

Commissioned as part of AHM's 'State of Play' series.

(Ainsley, Harding, and Moffat, (2012)

theahmblog.blogspot.com/p/about-ahm.html)

i. The Exhausted Artist reaches the end of the line with healthcare providers causing his already weak rainbow to flicker and dull.

ii. The prism that previously created this rainbow now needs re-calibrating or 'patching' with adaptations to repair it, or to replace it.

iv. To restore the affected frequencies of this 'rainbow-of-exhaustion' we instigate super-low energy art interventions across three seemingly idiosyncratic hierarchical categories;

1. Art as Immediate Triage,

2. Art as Perceptual Enhancer

and

3. Art as Cosmological Portal...

v. We use psychogeography, alpha states, astronomy, broken instruments, bricolage, but in particular, art that is made through appropriation, allowing large-scale artworks to be built without budget or physical effort.

vi. Accidentally, these processes are of benefit to audiences outside of the ME / Chronic Fatigue Syndrome community.

2. The Idio

In the last chapter we examined the nomenclature, origins, and problems of holism. Here, we undertake a similar enterprise with the word 'idio' (sometimes spelled 'ideo') in order to validate forging a portmanteau term with holism to form *idioholism*.

One of the first *idio* prefixes I located had an immediate resonance as my illness may be *idiopathic* (we briefly encountered this term in Chapter 6).

1. **Idiopathic:** adj.

Denoting a disease or condition the cause of which is not known or that arises spontaneously.

(Oxfordreference.com, 2014)

The next idio was equally apt, and hinted at an 'inward-looking' enquiry.

2. **Idiographic:**

The term "idiographic" comes from the Greek word "idios" meaning "own" or "private". Psychologists interested in this aspect of experience want to discover what makes each of us unique. Gordon Willard Allport described the term idiographic to be "unique dispositions based on life experiences peculiar to ourselves. He argues that they cannot be effectively studied using standardised tests." - Nomothetic Idiographic Debate (McLeod, 2014, online)

This establishes the potential of calling my practice ‘idiographic holism’. Next, we have idiom, which describes figures of speech and particular ‘ways of words.’ However, it could be argued that the primary idio in common parlance is:

3. Idiosyncrasy / Idiosyncratic Noun [C usually plural]:

a strange or unusual habit, way of behaving, or feature that someone or something has.

(Dictionary.cambridge.org, 2014)

In my idioholism, I infer that personal routes and practices from the first-person over the whole of one’s life would equal such an ‘idio(syncratic) holism’.

The fourth definition further lays out the terrain of the root of the word, and it originates from an arts context. We define what an idioglossia is from a book of the same name. An ‘Idioglossia’ is a ‘glossary of texts and terms generated in and around the Goldsmiths MFA Art Writing seminars at the Whitechapel Gallery 2011/2012’ (Noonan-Ganley, 2012, rear cover). The book refers to itself as an entry in the body text (note: pages deliberately avoid numbers, perhaps as an idiosyncratic challenge to academic convention). Idioglossia is further defined as an idioticon, a kind of dictionary, specific to a unique line of enquiry. It was in the following quote that I first came across a more meaningful term which privileges the ‘idio’ – that of ‘idios kosmos’ a term that is so highly pertinent to the project, I have given it a further expanded explanation later in this chapter.

First, let us examine what, according to the editors of the publication, an idioglossia is:

4. Idioglossia

The word “idioglossia” is derived from the Greek “idios”: pertaining to the private, and from “glossa”: language. An “idiot”, who today is broadly taken to be “one who is ignorant”, was originally “one who does not take part in public life”, sometimes this refers specifically to someone who does not exercise his or her vote.

The root “idios” gives us “idioticon”: a list of words defined in relation to a specific discourse, as distinct from the list of words found in a dictionary, where they are reported according to general usage, “idiosyncrasy”: an action which appears to serve no purpose because the actor's motivation is hidden or private i.e. “though this be madness, yet there is method in't”, and “idiom”: a phrase whose meaning is private because it is not decipherable through understanding the literal definitions of its constituent words.

Idiocy in its many forms, demonstrates that there is a relationship between public space and the application of language in relation to the subjective beliefs or understandings of its users and the specific discourse that these users carry out.

Perhaps then, we could say that it is idiocy when instances of language are privately owned or traded; as soon as they are uttered or committed to paper our words escape from the “idios kosmos” of private thought and enter the “koinos kosmos” of public life.

(Noonan-Ganley, 2011, n.d. note: *physical publication has no page numbers*)

But there is also a caveat in this definition. Noonan-Ganley suggests that *idio* or Greek *idios* is part of the etymology of *idiot* early on in the entry, before going on to suggest that a historical kind of idiocy was not necessarily equated with stupidity, and that instead it was a term which privileged private and unusual views. This was somewhat a relief: whilst there may be some anarchic or counter-cultural aspect in calling my practice ‘idiot-holism’ it would probably prevent it from being taken seriously.

In Noonan-Ganley’s definition, there is no neat explanation of using ‘idio’ as a general term or prefix. Moreover, the description originates from a (creative) art writing MFA from Goldsmiths College, University of London, where the writing can also be a playful response to a word in this ‘glossia’.

The first term in Noonan-Ganley’s entry on *idioglossia* we encounter, of *idiot*, is interesting because we learn that there was a time when this meant ‘one who does not take part in public life.’ If ‘idiot’ retained this meaning in the present-day, it would be particularly apt for those who are housebound because of illness. And one may even suggest that we could add a counter narrative to this ‘idiot’ – one who has been

forgotten from public life – as so many of the ME sufferers have become: invisible patients with invisible illnesses.

If we are permitted to think of the non-written elements in the project as a kind of language, then the vinyl trilogy is a kind of '*audio-visual idioticon*', three LPs, forging meaning in their own language to help offset CFS-ME. In fact, the word *ideophone* is not far from this, as we will discover now.

This *fifth* id(e)o also happened to be a vinyl trilogy. I came across this trilogy by chance and was unaware that other sonic artists had attempted a triple vinyl enterprise prefixed with an *idio* or *ideo*. Luckily the project (barely) resembled mine and in physical form only. Moreover, this was a work that referenced *other* work, and was also a curated gallery piece. The word is *Ideophone* and the record trilogy is called *Three Ideophones*⁴⁸

Three Ideophones (Goodiepal, Aeron & Alejandra, Piringer in collaboration with Lomme and van Bladel, 2008) is a box of three 10" vinyl picture discs from the publisher of artist publications – Onomatopee, an Eindhoven and Amsterdam based production label for such projects that translate texts, work with at the interplay between text and image and/or sound - with a focus on poetry, typography and sound art.

⁴⁸ <http://www.onomatopee.net/project.php?progID=2c5215ddb29a808abcd68d12199f6f>

But what are Ideophones? One definition is that Ideophones are (often) words whose form is suggestive of their meaning. Familiar examples include the English *kerplop* and *boom* or German *holterdipolter* and *tick-tack*.⁴⁹

From the sleevenotes of the box:

[The publishing label] Onomatopée got into a quest for onomatopoeic qualities, whereby we refer to literal, auditory and visual qualities within one medium, and invited three artists to make this happen.

The title of the project is 'Three Ideophones', a reference to the work of experimental music pioneer Dick Raaijmakers⁵⁰.

An oft-cited definition of the notion of ideophone is: 'a vivid representation of an idea in sound. A word, often onomatopoeic and reduplicated, which describes a predicate, qualificative or adverb in respect to manner, colour, sound, smell, action, state or intensity.' For instance the word 'Bling Bling' is an ideophone. Multiple layers of meaning; sound, shiny, expensive or rich etc.

Two artists and one duo, Goodiepal (DK), Aeron & Alejandra (E/US) and Joerg Piringner (AT), have been challenged to produce their 'Ideophone'. These artists can all be addressed to as 'multidisciplinary

⁴⁹ Source: <http://ideophone.org> - an research site about the phenomena of ideophones
Dick Raaijmakers (Raaijmakers) (1 September 1930 - 4 September 2013) was a Dutch composer, theater maker and theorist. Source: <http://v2.nl/publishing/dick-raaijmakers-a-monograph>

artist'. In contrast with this conception, Onomatopée does not believe in multidisciplinary as 'unity in diversity', but believes in the idea of 'unity'. We believe we can put forward the concept of the Ideophone as an accountable basis for this profession and, likewise, as a verb that serves the outcome of this project. The ideophone would serve as a motive, within the practice of the invited artists as well as for the challenge this project targets. In this Ideophone they captured the multiple layers of their artistic practice in one single object.

There appears to be some common ground with my work, although I was not aware of this project at the inception of my own. So it was with some trepidation that I approached the records, (which I bought in Germany on the same day I premiered *The Idioholism Vinyl Trilogy* at a Berlin artists' space – www.image-movement.de, a gallery space / shop presenting works by multimedia artists in the heart of the city). Here, in my hands, were objects and texts that spoke about unity, through bringing together different artists' collaborations and thought experiments around the exploration of 'Ideophonic' ideas or ideas around onomatopoeia. As it turned out, it was, as I should have expected, highly idiosyncratic and crucially bore no relationship to my project – apart perhaps in the impulse to make a form of 'vinyl trinity' that was in some way connected to 'an ideo/idio'. Of course, let us not forget that the idea of the trinity and trilogy is a common form in art production. However, the idea that there were people making vinyl trilogies at same time as I was, around the idea of an ideo, or an idio, sent shivers down my spine, and illustrates if an artist thinks she/he has developed a unique niche, research is ever-more essential if originality is key.

The *Idioholism Vinyl Trilogy* doesn't investigate onomatopoeia, so I was happy to purchase the box set as a text to cite here, as a triple vinyl collection around a phenomenon, and leave it there, as a text. What I turn to next, is that which underpins my idioholism historically. We shall leave objects and return to concepts and definitions of the idio, with possibly the most relevant term that serves to underpin the vinyl LPs as an entire individual world-view - an *idios kosmos*, which I have tried to create as part of a collective or shared cultural world - the *koinos kosmos*.

3. A short survey of *idios kosmos*

Attributed to the Philosopher Heraclitus (535 – 475 BC), the phrase *idios kosmos* may be defined as 'private' or 'personal' world - contrasting with, but related to *koinos kosmos* ('shared' world). *Idios kosmos* may be seen as a perspective of the world from first-person experience where one's universal view is inescapably subjective, unique or idiosyncratic. In contemporary journals however one sees the term most frequently related to the psychiatric realm or within studies into the nature of consciousness. Today, in using a term such as *idios kosmos*, one finds it most commonly cited in relation to mental illness, schizophrenia and delusional states – a personal world, but one gone *awry*.

Here is a typical example: in *Founding Psychoanalysis Phenomenologically* we read of Ludwig Binswanger, a Swiss psychiatrist and pioneer in the field of existential psychology who "proposed that the private universe (*idios kosmos*) of dreaming shares features with psychosis" and is related to "the phenomenology of lived-bodily

experience [which] could lead to the constructive revision of the psychoanalytic unconscious" (Mishara, Lohmar & Brudzinska, 2012, p.170).

In addition, Lejla Kucukalic's *Philip K. Dick: Canonical Writer of the Digital Age* spells out the science fiction writer and philosopher's understanding of both *idios* and *koinos kosmos* - with reference to the author's experience of schizophrenia and with reference of it in his work:

Dick's view of subjective and objective perceptions is focused in Heraclitus' formulation of the universe as consisting of private *idios kosmos* and the collective *koinos kosmos*, the two realms that determine our existential position in the world. ...Dick explains his understanding of the private and public worlds: "No person can tell which parts of his total worldview is *idios kosmos* and which is *koinos kosmos*, except by the achievement of a strong empathic rapport with other people" ... "In all of my books, well virtually all," continues Dick, "the protagonist is suffering from a breakdown of his *idios kosmos*—at least we hope that's what's breaking down, not the *koinos kosmos*" For the schizophrenic, the *idios*, the private world, will always fall apart, according to the author.

(Kucukalic, 2008, p.54)

So whilst this psychiatric focus is a specific application of the Greek *koinos* terms, in my view this does not negate the potential (and conceptual) usefulness of the phenomenon of a 'personal' or *idios kosmos*. This can be related to contemporary

culture, alongside such related individualistic terms such as ‘artists’ cosmology’ (as we saw in the chapter on holism) or ‘family constellations’⁵¹, and my own ‘idioholism’.

Therefore, I will present a cluster of contemporary examples of how the term is cited before offering some thoughts on how I find it to be related to my own *idioholism*.

Firstly, Donald P Moss, writing in *The Journal of Phenomenological Psychology* introduces the “private logic” of this *kosmos*.

... all individuals create their own reality, but the healthy individual does so in dialogue with community, constructing a "common sense," or a shared cognitive map of reality, while the unhealthy individual does so in isolation, producing a "private logic," or an eccentric schema of reality lacking commonality with the shared social world. We all live in a constructed cosmos, but that cosmos finds its place between the ideal extremes of the *koinos kosmos* and the *idios kosmos* - the common world and the idiosyncratic world in isolation.

(Moss, 1992, p.98)

In Religion and Psychiatry: Beyond Boundaries: Implications for Clinical Practice

Juan José López-Ibor Jr. and Maria Ines López-Ibor Alcocer describe how the ‘sane’ person may inhabit both *idios* and *koinos kosmos* concurrently – but crucially, the person is usually able to distinguish between the two states:

⁵¹ “The “Family Constellation” process is a trans-generational, phenomenological, therapeutic intervention with roots in family systems therapy, existential-phenomenology, and the ancestor reverence of the South African Zulus. Although the Family Constellation process is sanctioned by family therapy associations in Europe” (Cohen, 2006, 226-233)

Phenomenological and existentialist influenced psychiatry has described how delusional ideas consist of the desire to control one's own world, *idios kosmos*, or the common world, *koinos kosmos*. Each one of us is in two worlds at the same time, the one of common reality and one's own in which fantasy, dreams or simple longings and hopes reign. The sane person is able to distinguish one from another, and even to pass from one to another even when doubts about that radical ambiguity of our consciousness assault him or her. In delusions everything is different. Not able to live in a *koinos kosmos*, the patient substitutes and misappropriates the *idios kosmos* in such a way so as to not be able to distinguish what is what. ...The brilliant, innovative man, creator of new worlds feeds in an *idios kosmos*, but immediately communicates it, drags others to participate in it and recognize in themselves the creating force. Truth with capital letters, enriching as a contrast to the private truth of the delusional individual that is but the dramatic effort to reach a truth illness denies.

(López-Ibor Jr. and López-Ibor Alcocer, in Verhagen (ed) 2009, p.215)

With regard to 'the dramatic effort to reach a truth illness denies', the authors above are inferring an illness in terms of psychiatric conditions, and within such, an individual is sometimes 'trapped' in *idios kosmos*, unable to relate to the *koinos kosmos* due to their condition. I find this interesting in regard to states of physical and cognitive torpor within conditions like my own, that one may have to 'make do' with the truths one finds in limited means. That said, if that practitioner can be said to be

non-delusional but still remains limited by physical and cognitive health in regard to their own horizons, does that make one's personal truths any less true than a so-called collective *koinos* or 'objective' truth? Moreover, if we revisit what Donald Ross earlier terms 'an eccentric schema' to describe someone with a dysfunctional approach to a world-view, an artist would not necessary have a problem with this description. Obviously one would wish that such a practitioner was not just a slave to eccentricity or enslaved by schizophrenia and related conditions. In this light, perhaps an artist deliberately developing 'an eccentric schema' could be seen as a perfectly valid way of encountering the world?

Because this research project has been about exhaustion, it would be interesting to see if there was an example of *idios kosmos* cited in as close relation to exhaustion as possible i.e., in relation to CFS-ME. Whilst the search for such a specific definition of this *idios kosmos* in relation to CFS-ME currently seems unlikely, Jiří Wackermann speaks about how we move from the shared world to the private world every time we sleep, and of the paradox in articulating an aspect of phenomena which the absence of regular consciousness (sleep) prevents:

As Heraclitus said ...the world of the waking is one and shared but that the sleeping turn aside each into his private world (Kahn, 1979, fragment VI). Now, what is the passage between the two worlds like? ...If we conceive, with Heraclitus, the falling asleep as a passage from the commonly shared world (*koinos kosmos*) to a private world (*idios kosmos*) of the sleeper—that is, a transition between two

different orders of experience—then it is also conceivable that the passage may follow different paths for different subjects.

(Wackermann 2010, pp.1093-1094)

Wackermann suggests that everyone's 'passage' between his or her private world and shared world is unique. If we extend the sleep metaphor to other modes of exploring the self, of which an art practice may be one, then it is especially apt to think of this passage in regard to the autoethnographer developing world-views, or perhaps 'holistic exercises' within their fields and their limits: each one unique, in the context of a shared or *koinos kosmos*. Finally, with slightly larger magnification in *Borderlands of Psyche and Logos in Heraclitus: A Psychoanalytic Reading*, Jessica Ann Mayoc cites Merleau-Ponty (who based his approach on Heraclitus) to illustrate how despite living in a *koinos kosmos*, we do so based upon our personal reasoning and our embodied worlds.

As Merleau-Ponty remarks in *Eye and Mind*⁵², "the *idios kosmos* opens by way of vision upon a *koinos kosmos*". Vision is the power that unites inner and outer, allowing the seer to recognise the continuity of the self with the world. The *idios kosmos*, the experience of a "private world", is an important element in Heraclitus' description of the mortal condition, and signifies a self-inflicted separation from the shared logos. The theme is echoed throughout his sayings, but is perhaps most present in fragment 2 [from Heraclitus]:

⁵² The Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader, Northwestern University, 1993, page 128

2: Although this *logos* is shared, most men live as though their thinking were a private possession.

(Mayoc, 2001, p.151)

So what can we make of this term '*idios kosmos*' and '*kosinos kosmos*' in relation to artists' work and in particular, this project? We can see by the examples cited that whilst there have been examples of idiosyncratic, person-led, phenomenological truths borne from the first person, there is also the implied warning that some of these states of mind may be linked to schizophrenia and delusional states. But even without being particularly medical, one may argue that the artists working in isolation in relation to their own thoughts and impulses are vulnerable when defining any single experience as a definitive truth. In other words, a personal world may become 'untethered' unless, and with my own inference, it is part of a 'reflexive' activity between self and society, or as Wackermann puts it above, that the practitioner encounters 'a transition between two different orders of experience'.

In relation to this research project, although being primarily autoethnographic and first-person led, the works are based on my relationship with the external world. One of the impulses of my making the project was to continue to learn about the shared world through personal, sensory means. Within the vinyl trilogy there is a yearning and attempt to reach out beyond my own limited means to forge ways in which the individual assailed by little choice can work in idiosyncratic and adaptable ways. This, unavoidably, involves working from '*idios kosmos*' towards a wider '*koinos kosmos*' of experience and feedback, and this approach is 'a transition between two different orders of experience' as cited above.

4. Existing idioholic publications?

Since I have already introduced the term idioholism, let us survey some existing 'idioholic' publications. One may define these works as attempts to pursue/represent idiosyncratic art-interventions in response to real-world problems, in (near) self-directed ways.

During the last few years a number of 'instructional' and 'interventionist' art blogs and web sites by creative artists, translated to slick print editions, and have emerged in the art publishing world. One might say that the single philosophy behind each of these books, was a kind of 'alternative tourism' or 'experimental travel'.⁵³ Many of the artists' methodologies I am about to cite are distant cousins of 'psycho geography', a term which re-emerged from its Situationist past possibly due in part to the notable films of Patrick Keiller (*London* (1994) and *Robinson in Space* (1997) and in the 'noughties' by the writer Will Self who wrote a highly personal treatise on the word, if not a primer on the subject (*Psychogeography*, Self & Steadman, 2007). Between 2003 and 2005, I was also working in the 'psycho geographical realm' designing modest tours of Edinburgh and beyond, and was funded by the Arts Council of England to reimagine an alternative history of an East Sussex village⁵⁴.

Such methodologies of psycho geography have also found populist forms in the recent alternative tourism movement⁵⁵ enhancing the everyday experience in what artist Allen Ruppersberg terms as "the ordinary event" which "leads to the beauty and

⁵³ Experimental Travel or Counter-Tourism, e.g. Mythogeography <http://www.mythogeography.com/>

⁵⁴ <http://www.dooks.org/surreal/mainindex.html>

⁵⁵ Such a book would be *The Lonely Planet Guide to Experimental Travel* : Lonely Planet Publications; 1st edition (1 May 2005)

understanding of the world”. Art which attempts to immerse oneself in ‘the everyday’ is a tradition (and some may say responsibility) of cultural practitioners. Georges Perec’s *An Attempt at Exhausting a Place in Paris* (Perec and Lowenthal, 2010) is an apt monograph to study how the everyday can be deconstructed into minutiae that perhaps a CFS-ME sufferer could borrow some methodology from, albeit from an *enforced* geography, not one given through choice. In this light, a kind of ‘exploding’ of the everyday appears as a survival tactic and it has inspired some of my practice, so here is a brief primer to that slim monograph *An Attempt at Exhausting a Place in Paris* (Perec, G. and Lowenthal, M. (trans) (2010) Cambridge, Mass):

One overcast weekend in 1974, Georges Perec set out in quest of the ‘infraordinary’: the humdrum, the non-event, the everyday – “what happens,” as he put it, “when nothing happens.” His choice of locale was Place Saint-Sulpice where, ensconced behind first one café window, then another, he spent three days recording everything to pass through his field of vision... (Lowenthal in Perec 2010; *ibid*, rear cover)

Perec’s experiment with the everyday was first published in 1975 and I was interested to see how similar experiments dealing with the depth of ‘the everyday’ were being approached by today’s artists. For that reason, let us now turn to three recent publications that represent idiosyncratic art-interventions in response to real-world contexts, in (near) self-directed ways. Before doing so, let us map out the spirit and the terrain that allowed these publications to exist. All of these publications were forged out of a close relationship to the Internet and hark back to the ‘egalitarian’

roots of the early World Wide Web. Therefore I will briefly explore what laid the foundations not only for these books, but also that which eventually spawned this research project twenty years later.

“Learning to Love You More (and More)”

Fitter, happier, more productive, Comfortable, Not drinking too much, Regular exercise at the gym (Three days a week), Getting on better with your associate employee contemporaries, At ease, Eating well (No more microwave dinners and saturated fats), A patient better driver, A safer car (Baby smiling in back seat), Sleeping well (No bad dreams), No paranoia... Fond but not in love...

Fitter, Happier Thom Yorke & Radiohead 1997

Whilst the lyrics above from Radiohead’s hugely anticipated and popular pre-millennial ‘concept’ album *OK Computer* were intended to satirise ‘yuppie’ sentiments and glib marketing slogans of the day, at the same time, there was a genuine feeling *just before* the internet became a mass-market phenomenon, that true cultural exchanges and a spirit of community pervaded the world wide web in an unbridled and fairly unregulated manner. I was part of the internet when there was no advertising online, and websites were primarily message boards and libraries - and an egalitarian ‘atmosphere’ pervaded it. I was not yet housebound but I felt, that online, a sense of a

virtual community and optimism emerged, even if it was a kind of mirage⁵⁶ To the newly exhausted artist, this was the beginning of feeling less isolated from the world, which has continued to this day.

I had access to email since 1995 at a University I was teaching at, and felt a direct link between the co-operative excitement, optimism and positivity on the future of the world wide web regarding how we could discuss our lives so easily and exchange ideas, that I had connected online at home, at great personal expense, *just in time* as I become ill and housebound in the late nineties.

The casual but infamous (and oft-misquoted) exchange between Andy Warhol (1928-1987) and photographer Nat Finklestein (1933-2009) accidentally prophesised that “Everybody wants to be famous” (Warhol) to which Finklestein replied “Yeh, for about fifteen minutes Andy”. (Guinn and Perry p4, pp.364-365) Added to this, Joseph Beuys (1921-1986) famously claimed “everybody is an artist” (Literat, 2012, p.2974) arguing that art should not be divorced from life. These two statements, in my view, are increasingly coming to fruition in ever-subtler ways via social media and technological ease. Nearly every modern cellphone is able to access these sites. Take out such a phone, take a photograph of one’s child or a political rally and within seconds it is published worldwide, place that phone back in a trouser pocket, and we are all literally joined at the hip:

⁵⁶ Fred Turner gives an account of the origins of digital utopianism in the countercultural movements of the 60s and early 70s in *From Counterculture to Cyberculture* (2010)

[Beuys] famously claimed that everybody is an artist, but this artistic potential gets stifled by social norms and pressures. Far from advocating—as some mistakenly interpret his well-known adage—that everyone should be involved in the creation of art, Beuys believed in the creative abilities of people in their everyday life and advocated for a more extensive and inclusive reconceptualization of art.

(Literat, I, 2012, pp.2962-2984)

Because I will shortly turn to artists books and websites that aim to democratise the life of the artist, a thought experiment would be to resurrect Warhol and Beuys and demonstrate to them the phenomenon that everyone on Facebook and Twitter *is*, to an extent, now an artist, or at least, a kind of independent publisher and/or accidental artist/curator – simply by their commenting of and liking of an item on a feed and uploading their own images and videos. In my view, for all the oversaturation of creativity online – at least in the navigating of it, being housebound combined with following this arc over the years has been in the main, a liberating, if over-addictive experience. Some artists decry social media and crowdsourcing, but the exhausted artist may still find threads of egalitarianism here and there in online communities. The caveat would be to approach with caution, but still to approach.

Around 2003, in the rise of what came to be described as ‘Web 2.0’, (O’Reilly, 2005) blog sites like Wordpress and Blogspot (which actually existed in the late nineties), Flickr (formerly *Yahoo Photos* from 2004) and Tumblr (2006), made it easier for egalitarian web sites to exist, expounding images, texts, videos and embedding

TED⁵⁷ talks on how to be an artist. This was not conducted in a sense of art-school protocols but found instead in a chaotic, individualistic exchange of new media ideas on Wordpress, Tumblr, YouTube, Vimeo and eventually in Facebook feeds (where even professional artists now publish their works). As O'Reilly (2005) put it in his influential short definition:

Web 2.0 is the network as platform, spanning all connected devices;
Web 2.0 applications are those that make the most of the intrinsic advantages of that platform: delivering software as a continually – updated service that gets better the more people use it, consuming and remixing data from multiple sources, including individual users, while providing their own data and services in a form that allows remixing by others, creating network effects through an “architecture of participation” and going beyond the page metaphor of Web 1.0 to deliver rich user experiences. (ibid, 2005, n.p.)

During this period, a growing number of artists explicitly became transparent in relation to their methodologies by publishing and disseminating them – or literally became *about* designing such methodologies for others to carry out. Without the following various websites, and their resulting physical publications, these extremely populist and practical forms of D.I.Y. (even what might be termed bricolage) art-making, my research project would not take the shape it does. I have chosen three books to profile what I consider to be ‘idiholistic publications.’ Each is associated with, or sprang from a website:

⁵⁷ <http://www.ted.com>

1. David Horvitz:

Everything That Can Happen in a Day

(Horvitz and Poole, 2010)

2. Keri Smith:

How to Be an Explorer of The World

(Smith, 2008)

3. Harrell Fletcher and Miranda July:

Learning to Love You More

(Fletcher et al., 2007)

These books sometimes read as illustrated lists and graphically inventive instructions. They are, in the main, suggestions of how one might have a more interesting day through the deployment of art practices – tactics, strategies, games, interventions and re-framings. There is little commentary or discourse of why one may pursue such apparently strange activities (with the exception of *Learning to Love You More* which is a more labyrinthine project with a modest exegesis). Perhaps why I have cited them as potentially ‘idioholistic’ enterprises will be clearer if we begin with one of Horvitz’s ‘instructions’:

Everything That Can Happen in a Day

Instruction 25

Make a collection of sand from different beaches around the world by writing to resort hotels and asking them to send you an envelope of sand. Tell them you recently stayed at the hotel and that your sand was lost when you travelled home.⁵⁸ (Horvitz and Poole, 2010, .p43)

The example above is particularly enticing for the exhausted artist and typical of each of the publications. One might argue, that each book, which contains apparently ‘random’ art assignments are, in fact, ‘idioholic visions’ when viewed over the entirety of each given publication. They appear to the reader *at least* as primers of surreal time wasting. But they are more than this. The books provide teachings and exercises located somewhere between auto didacticism and very loose syllabuses suggested by other artists. They can even resemble artists’ manifestos: *Learning to Love You More* adopts a pleasantly dictatorial tone at times; even the preface makes this clear:

Sometimes it is a relief being told what to do
(Fletcher *et al.*, 2007, p1)

And for my potentially exhausted audience, *if some of them can be done from one’s house without leaving it*, then all the better for the purposes of this research project. In the essay which accompanies the assignments in *Learning to Love You More*

⁵⁸ EVERYTHING THAT CAN HAPPEN IN A DAY, Horvitz, David, 2010, Mark Batty, NYC p24

'A Modest Collective Many People Doing Simple Things Well' by Julia Bryan Wilson - there is a good example of this which was both carried out locally and exhibited online (and in some galleries):

63: Make an encouraging banner. The assignment, issued by Harrell Fletcher and Miranda July as part of their interactive, web-based project *Learning to Love You More*, has been completed by dozens of people all over the world. Strung up in bedrooms and dangling from fences, the blocky, multi-coloured messages are not your average greeting card fare. DYSLEXIA BUILDS CHARACTER! reads one streamer, ruefully affixed above a personal computer (submitted by Brock of Toronto). Some are tinged with dark humour: YOU STILL HAVE BOTH OF YOUR LEGS, reminds Lauren Oster of New York. Others are less heartening than elliptical: one, hung from a tree branch, cautions viewers to LOOK TWICE (Shira Bannerman, Poughkeepsie). These unexpected turns—how the artists' instructions get interpreted, exceeded, or unsettled—contribute to the project's dynamism. The surprising variations on a theme demonstrate how seemingly arbitrary rules, when strictly followed, can yield profound aesthetic pleasures. In LTYM, Fletcher and July issue directives simple but exacting instructions meant to be followed as closely as possible and posted in the form of reports. Each assignment is designed to stimulate thought, foster discussion, or provoke insight. As the site explains: "The best art and writing

is almost like an assignment; it is so vibrant that you feel compelled to make something in response.”
(Fletcher *et al.*, 2007, p.144)

The common theme across these three books is that *first-person* experiments are disseminated to the public. To an extent, the books are ‘completed’ by the public. Reading them alone is not enough. That is also a goal of this research project. Like these books, I am developing a series of small interventions that becomes part of a narrative (or exploratory) arc over each LP record. The records together become a kind of syllabus. The arc is the whole that contains the individualistic exercises. In the books, some of the exercises even attempt to actualise miniature worlds themselves, like this one from Keri Smith:

How to Be an Explorer of The World Exploration

#52 MINIATURE ECOSYSTEM

Collect water from three different sites. These can include a lake, pond, stream, puddle, or similar. Combine the samples in a jar in a sunny location and watch to see the ecosystem unfold. Soon this miniature world will start to organise itself and create some interesting results. Make notes about the daily changes. Experiment with different water sources to see how the results vary. Each ecosystem is unique. Source: *Gaia’s Garden* by Toby Hemenway⁵⁹
(Smith, 2008, p.135)

⁵⁹ <http://www.patternliteracy.com/books/gaias-garden>

In each book, each artist leads their practice by demonstrating the unique bias of being themselves. Despite this, the experiments can be personalised by others when undertaken outside of that particular artist's world.

In the website archive⁶⁰ of *Learning to Love You More*, this playfully dictatorial kind of rhetoric allows for a surprising and liberating reciprocal element to the project when the public then are asked to design some of the later 'assignments' of the project, which are as idiosyncratic as that of the authors. Being told that *sometimes it is a relief being told what to do* is a statement about choicelessness that resonates particularly with people who are also exhausted patients like myself.

Fun for all the family?

In the three publications we are profiling here, a lot of the exercises are suitable for families, which is often a part of contemporary art practice that has to come under the formal banner of 'community education / engagement' The following assignment could be undertaken by every member of my family (it may be a push to include my four month old daughter directly) my but my young son and I would gain from this:

⁶⁰ <http://www.learningtoloveyoumore.com>

Learning to Love You More Assignment #10

Make a flier of your day

Write a paragraph describing a typical day in your life. Make one hundred Xerox fliers of the description (you don't have to include your name) and post them all over your neighbourhood.

(Fletcher *et al.*, 2007, p151)

The individualistic way of looking at the world, in parts and modules – which all these books encourage – are united by them being a collection, a folio, or a compendium of ideas. When viewed or practised daily, weekly, monthly and so on, a 'whole' emerges in form of a body of work, but also a body of ideas. As time passes, this body of ideas eventually becomes – ultimately – the *modus operandi* of the practitioner with little divorcing of activity and life. This is what my life has become; there is no barrier between living it and making art projects. When such barriers break down between my life and my practice, I am now stating it becomes a lived *idioholism*. This is why I can be a fairly prolific cultural practitioner whilst being ill, because I am never not being an artist. In addition, I always have my equipment charged and ready to go, to minimise effort.

If my term *idioholism* puts anyone off or is interpreted as hyperbole, perhaps we might call these activities simply 'collections of individualistic exercises.' When the practitioner completes such exercises, s/he begins to see the interrelationships of the modules through the biases of each artist/author. So they undergo both an 'individualistic' and 'holistic' vision built up by accretion, from practicing small conceptual exercises. In my vinyl trilogy, this is done by a minimum of three divergent

subject areas. But it is crucial to say that, as in the discussion on holism in Chapter 6, what is being created here are holisms, or holistic *pluralities*. In the previous chapter we arrived at the conclusion that there is no singular holism, but a multiplicity of holisms. Whilst these books may encourage countercultural self-supporting activities, they are still as different to each other as they are similar.

Some of the assignments in these books appear insubstantial at first glance – until, crucially, one practices them. Despite appearing somewhat frivolous, what is being offered resembles ‘free art schools’ in and of themselves. These approaches are subtly influenced by critical concepts such as Situationism and Psychogeography (as introduced in Chapter 3), and other potentially countercultural practices such as self-publishing and modestly covert public art. I have evaluated these publications in the first person, arriving at the conclusion that there *is* a kind of egalitarian conceptual art practice here. For example, in the extract below provides a kind of fusion of geography and art, a concept everyone can relate to whilst still making the world strange:

Everything That Can Happen in a Day

Instruction 38

Calculate how far away the Pacific Ocean is from your bedroom.

Write the following on your bedroom wall: “the pacific ocean is
(enter calculated distance) from here.”

(Horvitz, 2010, pp.62-63)

These are populist and highly accessible artists’ books, presented as lush folios with dramatic and optimistic titles. That they are populist does not negate the insights

that may be gained from following the deceptively simple instructions within. They bridge the gap between art concepts that may alienate a suspicious public and instead make visible that which is missing in the public's appreciation of conceptual art – that of *process*. And they do so without much complex theoretical or critical text, and use the idea of play as part of this. That they avoid, in the main, complex or alienating art theory terms and place themselves more firmly in the 'occupational,' active side of art practice has simply encouraged practitioners, especially the exhausted practitioner, to discover a kind of populist practice-as-research. Despite my work existing within a contemporary art context, and niche record retailers, I am certainly not anti-populist, so there is a resonance.

To attend a 'reputable' art school has become a very expensive enterprise in most countries, and alternatives like these cheap folios offer how one may use the time one has on the planet to curious ends, in both surreal and serious exercises. Perhaps they also arrived to us culturally as a reaction to the 'bucket-list' publications which instructed us on the *fifty things we should do, visit, or experience – before we die* (i.e. 'kick the bucket' of the title). Every time I encounter a compendium of 'fifty things to do before I die' or suchlike, I always ask according to *whom*? Instead, within books like those I have profiled, and in my own research, I hope to encourage the practitioner to invent their own more reflective personal and imaginative interventions. One person's bucket list is always different from another's. If adopted, idiosyncrasy would be equally pluralistic.

David Horvitz describes his exercises as 'instructions' – Fletcher and July use a more journalistic or academic position of issuing 'assignments' whilst Keri Smith opts

for the term 'explorations'. The nuances and differences of these terms seem small but remain significant. 'Instructions' seems an almost neutral stance to take – whilst 'assignments' suggest that the artist is carrying out the tasks for someone else. 'Explorations' may be seen as a slightly vague position to take, but at least allows for there being no 'right' or 'wrong' approach.

In this typology, I've called my own interventions / exercises 'strategies'. This seems an appropriate point to discuss some of the methods of my own vinyl record project and to consider to what degree the public at large might be able to take up some of the concepts.

5. The transferability of the project's principles

Or, Six 'Idioholic Strategies' based on The Idioholic Vinyl Trilogy

Was it possible to economically translate six of my own strategies from making the vinyl trilogy into replicable exercises? I have taken two of my methodologies from each of the three records and made six repeatable exercises from them. Although the sleeve notes have expounded what my methodologies have been, it has been my aim to always have an eye on the transferability of the project to a non-academic audience. What follows are those attempts to make 'assignments' (Fletcher & July's term) / 'instructions' (Horvitz' term) / or as Keri Smith calls them - 'explorations': thus I present my own set of six 'idioholic strategies':

Idioholic Strategy #1

From *The Eskdalemuir Harmonium*

Record a broken instrument

Find a broken instrument that is so broken that it is difficult to play as intended or with minimal interference from the player / composer. An example is a smashed recorder or a guitar with broken strings. You are not required to understand any formal musical theory or be able to play music in the formal sense. You don't have to find a broken harmonium, it can be literally any instrument compromised by overuse, neglect or a breakage. Record the results with a small digital recorder or a smartphone and upload it to a soundcloud.com account with the tag '*idioholicism-broken-exercise*' with a one paragraph about your relationship with this instrument. How does it feel? Liberating? Stupid? You should include a square portrait of the instrument as the image soundcloud requires for the track. When you then search for '*idioholicism-broken-exercise*' you will find out if anyone else is doing the same kind of investigation.

Idioholic Strategy #2

From *The Eskdalemuir Harmonium*

Create your own outdoor broken instrument sanctuary.

For over quarter of a century, Australian composer Ross Bollater⁶¹ has deliberately exposed unwanted pianos to the elements of time and weather creating novel and unexpected musical possibilities of ruined pianos: that is to say, old pianos that 'have been'. "A piano is ruined (rather than neglected or devastated) when it has been deliberately abandoned to all weathers and has become a decaying box of unpredictable thumps, creaks and unpredictable resonations. It is said that the notes that don't work are at least as interesting as those that do" (Bollater, 2014). Similarly, collect instruments that will begin to rot and decompose in damp conditions or extreme heat. Curate them as a both a collection of visually interesting items (perhaps hang them on a tree) but do use them to make music and sound art from them.

Question at this point 'who is authoring the work?'

⁶¹ <http://corms30.wix.com/warpsmusic>

Idioholic Strategy #3

From 300 Square Miles of Upwards

Create your own deliberately random piano improvisation

Choose five notes on a Piano over two octaves. This will be your own 'scale' – the notes may be random or personally meaningful, but once you have chosen your five you must stick to them. Now, try and play them slowly but as carelessly as possible. A slow kind of ambient music should result. You are not allowed to deviate from this number of notes. The results should sound softly random. The only choice you have is to alter velocity of note (how hard you hit each key) and the order you hit each key in is up to you, however, the sustain pedal must be pressed all the way through the improvisation. As you play, as soon as you think you are developing a 'tune' attempt to abandon the idea and become as random as possible. Slow down. Record the results. Evaluate if despite your best efforts, a tune or pattern has still emerged or not.

A caveat: you may include Morse code in the composition if you get really stuck, or perhaps if you don't.

Idioholic Strategy #4

From 300 Square Miles of Upwards

Create your own deliberately random piano improvisation, but this time with someone reading out the names of astronomical constellations in a language you don't understand.

Repeat exercise #3, but find a friend, preferably for whom English is not the first language spoken. Work with them to translate twenty-five astronomical constellation terms they can read and/or sing over the top of your piano improvisation. If possible mix the sound of the narrator and singer into your piano work.

Idioholistic Strategy #5

From *CIGA[R]LES*

Appropriate discarded notes and tuning up of orchestras and bands as your own compositions.

In the sleevenotes to LP3 'CIGA[R]LES' I stated 'I find myself standing in the middle of bushes in a park close to my house, trying to discreetly record several bagpipe bands rehearsing concurrently for Ayr's Pipes in The Park. With my field-recorder I am trying to capture, even 'create' music without formally 'composing' it. I can hear an out-of-synch cacophony of pipes and drums to my far left and right. Have I discovered a ready-made soundscape by serendipity? Can I appropriate this soundscape as a composition?'

This is a very easy exercise to repeat in order to 'compose' music thought of discarded. The idea is that the practitioner makes stereo field recordings through the use of stereo digital recorders (or similar apparatus) whilst choosing the location of where sounds overlap (at festivals for example) as the place we can call 'the authoring spot'.

Here, by recording musicians tuning up, practicing guitar licks, or like in my case, eavesdropping on the warming up of the lungs of bagpipes, one may 'create' a unique recording, which we may appropriate as a personal composition – by defining the microphone as a music instrument in reverse - and the practitioner as a 'professional listener'.

By defining the place of composition, when it begins and when it ends, the practitioner authors the composition. The moral implications of recording with and without permission are down to the practitioner's personal ethical code.

Idioholistic Strategy #6

From *CIGA[R]LES*

Too ill to travel the world? Bring the world to you.

Attend, if possible a festival or symposium where the visitors are international – or at least not local to you. Enter a dialogue with the participants – or not – and record snippets of voices, snatched conversations and short pieces of music. Edit a dozen or so snippets together to form a travelogue with which you may use to define yourself as an international artist – or at the very least, a traveller where previously you were stationary.

The B-side of *CIGA[R]LES* features a lengthy movement where one can hear sounds from all over the world analogous to the various soundscapes we placed on the Voyager spacecraft in the 1970s.

Instead I managed to get to various street festivals in the South of France where international artists allowed me to record a few seconds of their music and I was able to assemble a soundscape from Basque Spain, Provence, Russia, Finland and the UK within one square kilometre. The field recorder here, allowed me, literally, to coin Keri Smith to be a '*collector of the world*'. So my instruction would be to attempt to attend and engage performers, to collect snippets of culture to be amalgamated onto one soundscape.

Too exhausted to travel? There is a simpler version of this exercise that I designed specifically for the housebound / bedbound. It is simply 'windowsill recording'. For 30 days in 2012 I left my field recorder 'objectively' collecting sounds that I would then listen to in bed. It required no editing, but for the sake of the record I did edit it and it appears as a track entitled 'The Loaning' – a nearby street to me.

I hid the recorder, I left the house on each day and when I returned I brought the outside in. This is a small step that a severe ME sufferer could adopt to increase their dwindling life experience and that has been one of the most enlightening aspects of LP3.

5. Conclusion and *The Ten Minute Manifesto of Idioholism*

There is something of the incorrigible optimist about the manifestoist.

To make a manifesto is to hallucinate the Promised Land, wherever that may be. It is in its own way a utopian project. It is certainly not an undertaking for the faint-hearted. In this sense, perhaps, it is apt for the artist. The characteristic stance of the artist-manifestoist is a sort of spiritual resilience, an uprightness, amid the general flux and flex [...] As Cezanne knew, the artist's work is never finished. Nor yet the manifesto...

Alex Danchev,

100 Artists' Manifestos (page xxviii), 2011

At the beginning of this chapter I reproduced *The One Minute Manifesto of The Exhausted Artist v.1* before mounting an enquiry into what the 'idio' might be, both in relation to the word's origin and also in response to the chapter that preceded this one – the chapter on holism. Following on from this, in the second part of the chapter, I wanted to locate which 'ancestral' term, if any, my own humble, small-scale practice may be aligned with, including the *idios kosmos* of Heraclitus. Finally, in part four, I was evaluating to what extent my own *idios kosmos* could be transferrable to the *koinos kosmos* of the world at large. I also found some examples of publications that may be considered to be 'idioholic visions' as artists' folios.

The five years that have passed between writing the original *One Minute Manifesto of The Exhausted Artist* have resulted in the revision that follows. And it is part of the tradition of artists' manifestos that we saw in Danchev's quote 'the artist's work is never finished, nor the manifesto.' (Danchev, 2011, xxviii)

This chapter has focused on individualistic forms of practice related to holism. In the previous chapter I examined how holism itself can be seen to have some universal qualities, such as a leaf being part of a plant only in relation to each other, and in that part and whole do not exist independently of each other (see Clark's comments and Kossoff's revisions, discussed in Chapter 6). However, I also examined that there exists no single holism, that what we encounter when we survey holism may be pluralities. Therefore, when applying models of holism to practitioners of individual disciplines or some with variety, it is inevitable that prefixing and augmenting the term will be a natural consequence of the context within one is working. In this light, my 'idioholism' was born and we shall now present it in a manifesto. The following manifesto is an attempt to launch divergent and economical art practices for those assailed by the challenges of CFS-ME.

The Second Manifesto of The Exhausted Artist

The Ten Minute Manifesto of Idioholism

Sequel to The One Minute Manifesto of The Exhausted Artist v.1

“We’re never gonna survive unless we get a little bit crazy”

‘Crazy’, Henry Olusegun Adeola Samuel aka Seal

1. *The significance of a syndrome like Chronic Fatigue Syndrome (or CFIDS, or ME) lies in both its invisibility and the breadth of the life-strata it retards. Under these conditions, can an art-orientated perspective claw back any ability to experience a fuller life? What are the adaptations that the art-practitioner must adopt in order to outmanoeuvre aggressive illnesses (like CFS-ME) that affect the whole person? Responses to illnesses like this are likely to be individualistic when the cause still remains speculative. There are no panaceas available to sufferers with CFS-ME.*

2. *I postulate Idioholism as a modest, autodidactic mode of self-learning, by triangulating three divergent and primarily occupational activities within the limits of the illness. It was devised as a bespoke coping mechanism for CFS-ME and a practical enquiry into exactly what can be improved by a philosophical art practice that crucially, does not exacerbate the illness.*

3. Could a tiny cluster of art practices forged from divergent strata of life, in line with the symptoms of CFS-ME, create a low-energy, aesthetic-led manoeuvre around the condition? Would an emphasis on practice-led and sensory activity, not negating the intellect, but negotiating it on the terms of the exhausted practitioner, forge interesting and unpredictable interrelationships? The goal would lie in the renewing of, in the smallest of ways, life-experiences for the exhausted practitioner.

4. The crucial point would be that the practitioner decides what the activities will be in the simple framework. This is what defines this 'holistic' enterprise as idioholism.

5. The framework: What defines such a 'triangulation'? – I have set three thematic principles that I felt were as transferable, simple and as universal in scope as possible. The practitioner chooses projects at their own pace within the following headings:

a) One art practice involves working with the body

e.g., when I take photographs, my blood pressure reduces.

e.g., when I play a harmonium, I am not conscious I am exercising and as a result the lymph around my body is processed.

e.g. when I am too exhausted to make music, I author it by recording a place where I have heard environmental sounds overlap.

b) One art practice involves that which is cosmological

e.g. Society passed me by, so I bypassed society and went straight to the stars, and learned three constellations visible from my window.

e.g. Cognitive fog creates memory problems. I learned about one incident about a huge iceberg and set it to song. The song imprinted well, and now I will never forget iceberg B15A which 'ran aground on the McMurdo sound...'

e.g. By meditating on the death of stars, I relax about making anything anymore and spend the remaining twenty minutes of energy with my son and daughter.

c) One art practice involves that which is local

e.g., I record sounds from my windowsill when I cannot leave the house and then listen to the sounds in bed.

e.g., Bored of my surroundings, I go deeper into them. Via the internet, I was able to locate the forest where my skirting boards originated, and postulate the type of tree felled.

e.g. Too sick to travel to another country, I visited a food fair in my own town, and whilst exhausting, I managed to record accents from at least seven countries and two continents.

*6. Something may look familiar about these headings (working with the body, that which is local and that which is cosmological). Whilst not quite 'mind, body, soul' they are a crude attempt of attending to diverse needs in the sufferer – physical, social and existential (if one is not keen on the word 'spiritual'). The key principle is that the activities themselves are divergent. It is postulated that it **may be within the space of the three activities** that the beginnings of a holistic and varied existence may begin to form. If we use the examples I cited, then it is easy to see that despite being unable to do much of what my peers take for granted, i.e. flying on a plane, walking up a hill, eating what they like, planning for the future – I have explored a life with much less breadth than 'the healthy', but one in which at least some depth is not negated by the illness.*

7. But how should one start an 'idioholistic' enterprise? Outside of my examples, what could such activities be? The practitioner will define them. However, if the thought of this creates a stumbling block, examples can be found in four artists' texts; chosen because of their brevity and accessibility, the exercises of which can be extracted and

placed into the categories of “the body, the local and the cosmological.”

The books are:

- 1. Learning to Love You More by Miranda July and Harrell Fletcher*
- 2. How to be an Explorer of the World by Keri Smith*
- 3. Everything that can Happen in a Day by David Horvitz*
- 4. Oblique Strategies Card Deck by Brian Eno and Peter Schmidt*

8. These books (and the latter card deck) offer seemingly random exercises, but they are all a great place to get started in devising one’s idioholistic enterprise. They may even be arbitrary. The autodidact with energy problems (the practitioner teaching him/herself) then designs their own economical syllabus over my three divergent headings.

9. The autodidact slowly but surely may re-engage with life without too much effort, yet learning and growth still occurs because of the potential interplay and plasticity between the areas. In doing so future practitioners forge their own contribution to the pluralities of holism, via idiosyncratic means. They become idioholists.

10. At least one idioholic enterprise has been formally undertaken by myself in the form of a vinyl record trilogy. Three colour-coded vinyl records, which appear in form to work as 'fragmented films' form a compendium of strategies in the first person but also as a finished product, becoming a kind of emissary from the idioholism experiment. See www.idioholism.com for further details.

Chris Dooks,

www.idioholism.com

September 2014

Chapter 8

The Idioholism Vinyl Trilogy:

Photography, Design and Sleeve notes

1. Photography & Design
2. The idioholism sleeve notes
3. 'Part of' or a primer?
4. LP1 SLEEVENOTES: The Eskdalemuir Harmonium
5. LP2 SLEEVENOTES: 300 Square Miles of Upwards
6. LP3 SLEEVENOTES: CIGA{R}LES

1. Photography & Design

In 2012, a small but notable artist's folio, 'Triggered Sound' (Young, Métayer, 2012) was published by Palavar Press in an edition of 150. Without any CD or downloadable soundtrack, the folio profiled sound artists and ambient electronic composers, contextualising a rarely seen aspect of these artists' work – their photographs. I begin with an extract from Young's text, then expand on how photography and graphic design are important elements in this project.

...[recorded] sound events function as frozen images, representing that entire, hidden, historical process of how they inevitably 'got here'. And every time we trigger a recorded sound, this historical image re-enters our present. I can't help but think that this is why recorded sound always tends to connect with our sense of memory. Perhaps just by virtue of its representation of the past, our brains are triggered to recall emotional events and sensations from our own past...

(Young, 2012, p.17)

That the records of this project are already finished and released has placed them in such a past. One motivation in making some of the works that are accompanied by images and text was to attempt to generate both a document of the experiences, and create a kind of emotional replay when encountering the records again. For my records to have the most 'efficacy' in the first person, as therapeutic objects to be revisited, the more context provided on my LPs as 'documents', the more likely I am able to revisit and remember these experiences.

What of the images on the records? Outside of the 12" outer-sleeves the images are laid out in grids and each rectangular picture averages a few centimetres wide. They primarily document place and minutiae of each site-specific locale and are fairly 'neutral' and straightforward in execution. There is a sense of order, but the images are not as sequential as a director's storyboard. Instead, they appear free and almost random. They have a visual and aesthetic logic as design elements themselves, but they do not function in isolation. How other listeners interpret and connect the documentary-like photographs to the text and sounds on the LPs will be down to their own curiosity; for this reason, the order of the images is open to interpretation.

When I revisit the records, play them, read the notes and look at the images my mood changes. When my mood changes my body follows suit. With CFS-ME, this aspect cannot be underestimated. This connection to previous experience can rescue oneself from the worst of days, knowing there is a window of opportunity to change one's circumstances. But what of when the images reach the public world as the records are released?

John Berger in his edited essay *Ways of Remembering*, in *Images: A Reader* (Manghani, Piper and Simons, 2006) emphasises the need of the multiplicity of context when moving images from the personal to the public sphere – which is essentially what I attempted to do in the vinyl enterprise.

The faculty of memory allows us to preserve certain events from oblivion... ...in private use a photograph is read in a context which is still continuous with that from which it was taken. ...the public photograph is divorced from all first-hand experience [as] it represents the memory of a total stranger. ...The problem is to construct a context for a photograph, to construct it with words, to construct it with other photographs, to construct it by its place in an ongoing text of photographs and images...

Memory works radially, that is to say with an enormous amount of associations leading to the same event... If we want to put a photograph back into the context of experience, social experience, social memory, we have to respect the laws of memory.

(Berger, in Manghani, Piper and Simons, 2006, pp.214-216)

My own memory is worsening as years pass, and not due to simple ageing. Photography here plays a part in recall and remembrance. What Berger terms 'respecting the laws of memory' resonates. In my practice, when imagery is combined with the sound and the text of my objects I have multiple opportunities in remembering the process. Early in Chapter 1, I posited the idea that through three different projects, a form of 'triangulation' could generate a 'proto-syllabus' of engagement with life. One could argue that principle could also be applied to each individual record. The text, the soundtrack/object and the photography may be seen as a multi-sensory record of memory in the first person, before other viewers feel or

‘triangulate’ their way between the constituent media forms that contribute to the whole record.

The 12” square covers help to represent the concepts and build up a symbolic/metaphorical language to communicate the ideas in the records. Here, the photographic content (maps, trees, insects) is deliberately minimal, to allow the conceptual colour-coding aspect of the project to be clear. So the primary photographic encounter with the work is a primary colour experience first. There is also a progression between LP1 to LP3 photographically. *The Eskdalemuir Harmonium* (LP1) is the ‘triage’ record and whilst the imagery is vérité in appearance, and full colour, it is framed by blood-red elements, perhaps suggesting a sense of urgency or repair akin to iconography of The Red Cross. But the design concepts developed in LP1 become perhaps more honed in LP2 and LP3. The progression between LP1 and the sequel *Three Hundred Square Miles of Upwards* (the ‘blue’ of which may be seen as the colour of our atmosphere in the ‘cosmological’ element of the trilogy) is that all the photographs in the latter album were selected because of their *blue* hues. Here was a blue cover, blue photographs – which were now fusing those ‘vérité’ elements with fine art sensibilities – and a record which was a highly saturated blue vinyl.

This slight difference or progression between the LPs allows for the records to be, to a degree ‘themselves’ outside of their identical typefaces, borders and graphics. By the time I created the final instalment in the trilogy, photography had been completely removed, to be replaced by antique illustrations from out-of-copyright material gathered at the sources: primarily because I wanted to locate (in that case)

images of cicadas emerging from their shells and bursting out, something that was difficult to photograph.

The typography and design between all three records was identical – important in communicating that these records belonged together. Rutger Zuyderveldt was the co-designer (who also adopted his sound-orientated *Machinefabriek* moniker for collaborative sonic work on *The Eskdalemuir Harmonium*). Zuyderveldt was adept at keeping the integrity of the project uniform given that the records and materials were made in factories in Canada (Toronto) (LP1) and the UK (London) for LP2 and LP3.

There is one final added dimension to the context in which photography and sleeve notes feature in the audit of works created for the project. There exist very simple films⁶² based on the photographic sessions I created ‘in the field’. Comprised of some of the photography from the entire project, they make useful promotional items, but also can be seen as a further attempt to bring myself closer to the moving image once more – and display a sense of plasticity between what defines a filmmaker, composer and digital artist. There is a documentary-like track on *The Eskdalemuir Harmonium* which is narrated as a short radio piece. Taking the opportunity to make a promotional piece from the images – I created, almost by accident, a documentary film *Betamax and Dictaphones* which was used at the launch event of that particular LP.

Now that I have given a short examination of how the visual materials came about, and given that the best way to encounter the visuals is in the documents themselves (i.e. the records) let us end with a little more of Young’s insight onto the

⁶² Listed sequentially in the concluding chapter

'hidden' life of the audio artist, and of the relationship of 'triggered sound' to photographic content from audio practitioners.

...Photography, as the act of recording our world, fitting it to a frame and creating a manipulable double, tightly mirrors the notion of triggered sound. Photographs and recorded sound both provide images of a past present and both have this great power over our emotional memory.sound artists [share] an acute consciousness in regards to recording, editing and playback devices, but more importantly, a concern for the implications of recorded sound and both the contexts and contours of our heard environments. It's the sound that we long for whilst gazing upon these photos because it's the sound that's been left behind [in this folio].

(Young, 2012, p18)

2. The idioholism sleevenotes

In the upcoming pages, the following sleevenotes, reproduced in full - were all written as the sonic works were produced, forming a diary-like element that aimed to both unearth the process and help me remember it. In this way, it can be said that the sleevenotes are directly part of the praxis. These are verbatim reproductions from the records themselves which are not 'academic' documents in the formal sense. So what follows after this primer on them, can be considered a kind of appendix - but to place it at the end of this exegesis would imply the methodologies employed in the discs are an afterthought – when they are crucial to this text. Although the reader of this text will hopefully have the physical records in front of them, the sleevenotes are included here for convenience also. However, one must note that most sleevenotes are more informally written - and are without academic citations (but they are not without references). Therefore, to address this phenomena, I have included any references the sleevenotes refer to, in the bibliography.

Sleevenotes, as I have suggested throughout this exegesis, can be seen as the 'script', 'narrative' or frequently the textual 'documentary' element of these so-called 'artisan' editions of vinyl releases. For the listener, the sleevenotes also serve as a commentary or layer of the process and help prime the listening experience.

Vinyl records, which may have pull-outs, coloured vinyl and extend into complex assemblages, can be highly personal and idiosyncratically 'read', 'played' and listened to. Vinyl 'fetishists' are often described of having a love and devotion to the format, comparable to religious ceremony. Whilst it is a cliché to invoke terms like

‘vinyl devotees’ – or speak of ‘the vinyl *cult*’ I am interested in the ways where ‘the order of service’ from person to person differs. Some even use white cotton gloves to handle the records...

In some ways the ‘gatefold’ edition of 12” records, prominent in the concept albums of the 1970s and undergoing a current revival, unfolding like a giant birthday card, is analogous in some ways to portable shrines I have seen in photographs of Catholic Mexico or Buddhist Tibet. They serve as backdrops to secular and sonic incantations on the vinyl. Sound may still be centre stage, but the framing and commentary of the sound are co-dependent with the sonic element. This is highly noticeable when one removes the visuals, text and ephemera, where a vastly different dynamic develops. If we look at ‘untethered’ mp3 files, which languish in isolation on a fragment of a hard drive, devoid of ‘ID3 tags,’ sound becomes devoid of its roots and heritage. Detached from photography and sleevenotes, sound-only releases risk loss of presence, narrative and context, and at worst, the whole enterprise may collapse, cheapening the experience. Without contextual anchors (such as sleevenotes or photography) we become divorced from the sound or music. One may construct a counter-argument to suggest that sleevenotes distract from the music, but in the context of vinyl records, or of my ‘fragmented film’ records, the sleevenotes are part of the end product and are reciprocally related to the other design elements, the artwork, the object as a whole and the vinyl. Additionally, the consumer of vinyl often expects their time and monetary investment to be rewarded in this way.

But vinyl is still a niche. It is expensive and it is inconvenient – which may also, paradoxically protect the format. Many of today’s *digital* releases become ubiquitous

sonic works frequently lost on hard-drives, suffering from a lack of context, fanfare or 'wow factor' despite attempts by iTunes or graphic designers and their D.I.Y. printed pdf labels. There are exceptions - Björk Guðmundsdóttir's *Biophilia* iOS project *Biophillia* (Guðmundsdóttir, Snib 2011) in which a large smartphone/tablet app is sold alongside the record to expand the experience with scientific links, videos, games - is a brave and immersive effort. Peter Gabriel's early experiments with CD-ROM work in the early 1990s or Coldcut's expanded *Let Us Play* CD+CD-ROM (Black, More and Warren Hill, 1997) and *Let Us Replay* CD+CD-ROM (Black, More and Warren Hill 1998) are examples of earlier works in which artists attempted to make a record more than a record by adding interactive elements. Vinyl doesn't do this in such a complex manner. The interactivity with vinyl is tactile and as a result forges a direct sense of engagement.

So what are the antitheses of sleevenotes, recorded music and perhaps the materialistic, tactile and embodied character of musical objects and sound art? Is it purely ephemeral work? In an almost Buddhist exercise of non-attachment to objects, Bill Drummond's response was to make a project like "The 17" (Drummond, 2008) where the artist removes himself from physical and recorded sounds altogether to form folk-choirs around the world and to never record any of it (see Chapter 6). However, Drummond is a dramatist in this way and despite the enterprise being one of non-attachment, it still forged a heavyweight text stuffed with manifestos and pronouncements of the experience. It seems that the need to document our sonic enterprises with text and images is a hard human faculty to shake off.

The records I have produced are ultimately directed by the listener who chooses how to reassemble the experience. This process begins by the unwrapping of the shrink-wrap covering the sleeve, effectively destroying the innocence one has with the pristine package, but the listener is in charge, and will likely not rush the experience (I even caught myself writing 'listener' in this paragraph, which is telling. vinyl record fans are rarely just *listeners*, they are musical holists of a kind.) It is not a click on an icon on a computer screen. Vinyl formats, in my opinion, foster a kind of curiosity – and patience - in which sleevenotes are the canonical players in the ceremony.

3. 'Part of' or a primer?

It is not unusual to have the sleevenotes take the form of a removable sheet of paper – meant to be taken away and appreciated on its own. Perish the thought of a vinyl connoisseur ever divorcing the sleevenotes from the objects they are married to, for the sleevenotes are part of the 'genetic makeup' of the final package. But in my case, there is a strong argument that the sleevenotes need to prime the listening experience because the methodology is as important as the final product. Of course many record fans and producers totally eschew the thought of sleevenotes existing *at all*. And that is often a way of preserving a purely sensory experience from being 'debased' by words. Usually, in my own past work, the product - i.e. the final outcome of the process - has always been my most valued part of my work. No more. During illness, process has at the very least become as important as, if not more than, for the

first time, any product. The sleevenotes elucidate this aspect of the work. Therefore I present here, the sleevenotes of the records.

4. LP1 SLEEVENOTES: *The Eskdalemuir Harmonium*

Limited Edition Transparent Red Vinyl LP

Published and Released by Komino Records, Toronto, November 2012

Edition of 300

[<http://kominorecords.com/promo/komino-004>]

Heavyweight full colour card inners

Launched at the Centre for Contemporary Arts, Glasgow, 11 Dec 2012

Layout by Rutger Zuydervelt & Chris Dooks

Sleevenotes:

If it *sucked* air past its reeds it might be called a *melodeon* but this one blows, so it's a harmonium, not to be confused with the smaller hand-pumped instrument of the same name used in Indian folk and devotional music. It's a lumbering object, like a baby elephant, about four and a half foot tall and wide, with heavy ivories. It has two *treadles* that must be triggered fairly briskly in order for the air to flood its internal bellows.

Accumulated dust causes constriction of the tubes, narrowing the airways like an asthma attack. Keys can stick, as can internal mechanics. Things can snap off, rupture. A lung can collapse or be torn open. In fact, an artificial lung is not a bad analogy. It's not that artificial either, the wood creaks and it always sounds sad, maybe from the karma of the ivory keyboard veneers, likely forged from tusks or other dentine. Elephants never forget.

In a harmonium, the more notes in your chord, the faster you have to pedal, the quicker you reach exhaustion. Also, the more notes in your chord the quieter it becomes and only pedalling much faster will keep up the volume. If you hold down a note and stop pedalling it really does feel like a dying breath. The processes involved are visceral.

Artists and musicians alike love to engage with it. I think the reason some of us are drawn to instruments like this is two-fold; a broken or wheezing apparatus brings out the anthropomorphic side of us because it 'feels' slightly human when we engage with it. But it is also a highly limited instrument, especially when it is old and broken, and for an exhausted non-virtuoso composer/player like myself, it is liberating *because* of the limitations, which are also endearing. I catch myself assigning human properties or illnesses to it, calling it arthritic and asthmatic. It can also be grumpy and stubborn depending on the weather.

Before I began this project, the only harmonium record I owned was *Music for a Found Harmonium* (Editions EG, 1985) by Penguin Café Orchestra, which managed to infiltrate popular culture and film soundtracks.

In the sleeve notes to *Preludes, Airs and Yodels (A Penguin Cafe primer, Virgin 1996)*, the story goes that Simon Jeffes found an old harmonium dumped in a back street in Kyoto in 1982. After transporting the instrument to a friend's house in a pretty suburb of the city, he visited it during the next few months, fondly recalling the period as one during which he was under a form of enchantment with the place and the time.

A similar experience has happened to me. I visit a harmonium regularly both because of the instrument itself, but also because of where it is. It's like going to see a distant relative in a care home. When I record or photograph the instrument, it becomes the axis of whatever I am doing near the site; the weather, my health, walks, memories, anxieties, my hopes for the future, the room I am sat in, the books on the shelf – all this context is recorded also. This accumulated experience is sometimes recalled to me when playing back the work.

In February 2011, I needed to get away for a while – not because I don't love my family, but because I was exhausted. I do this once or twice a year with my wife's blessing because of a fairly stressful illness I have had since 1999 (www.afme.org.uk if you are interested).

So I went away to refuel. I've done it before, such as in winter 2010 when I stayed in Brodick on the Isle of Arran, producing an hour-long 'radio-ballad' for Hibernata Recordings (a Northern English ambient music imprint). I did some writing and walking and stargazing. A self-imposed residency-retreat.

These 'retreats' – even retreats 'at home' – have transmuted into a collection of interdependent audio works for my PhD; ultimately forming a model of health through sonic art practice. Broken musical instruments for 'broken people' (e.g. the chronically ill) is one strategy explored here through sonic pilgrimages. I am especially excited if they are located in remote but accessible geographies.

And so, with monastic ideals in mind, I chose to stay at a Buddhist temple in Eskdalemuir, a village and district not far from Lockerbie in the Scottish Borders. It's like a tiny Tibet. I thought I'd stop there for a while, do a bit of meditation and return home a bit calmer, less addicted to my work. But the monastery had run out of rooms.

Luckily, I found local family-friendly accommodation in a sweet-looking farmhouse called "Rennaldburn" – which turned out to be the name of the stream ('burn' in Scotland), which trickled down the side of the farm. This farmhouse was available to rent – at least half of it, whilst the owners lived in the back. It was at this point I came across The Eskdalemuir Harmonium, not to mention two megalithic stone circles – *The Loupin Stanes* and *The Girdle Stanes* in the fields nearby.

When I discovered guests had access to this amazing instrument in the living room, there was no time to lose. Within an hour of arriving I had a field recorder plonked between the air-vent speakers recording long sustained tones, placing microphones in or around different parts of the machine. Despite my need for landscape and meditation, I had found some sense of immediate peace working with this awkward, antiquated and wheezing workstation. I just slid open the lid and began to compose 'stems' – long strands of sound where post-production would be the place to 'compose' the works. Get it recorded first, ask questions later, I'm only here for a day or two.

Playing a harmonium is a useful methodology for the artist who is rather

unwell – even if like myself you aren't a great player. A few fingers in the right places and some low-grade exercise from the feet will result in a very healing period of time. When I played on The Eskdalemuir Harmonium, I actually lost track of time altogether. It's like a spiritual exercise bike, and a kind of holistic enterprise – mind, body and creative energies effervesce when playing it. I say 'it', but 'it' turns out to be more than one instrument.

This album features two near-identical 'Estley' and 'Miller' harmonium models. One is kept warm and dry and the other has been allowed to decay in a barn. You can hear the owner of the instruments, Ita, speaking about them on *Betamax and Dictaphones* – a compressed radio documentary that closes the first side of the record. Whilst most of the work on the album is made with the warm and dry model, it is perhaps the album's closing track utilising the critically ill harmonium that is more conceptually interesting. It is very difficult to compose music with it, because it is stuck in a fairly discordant key. On the other hand, you might say it's very *easy* to compose with if you don't alter anything and are happy to work with the highly limited range of the machine, i.e., literally one chord!

This is a bit of a gift. I'm constantly looking for ways in which unwell artists like myself can make conceptual work and remain authors of cultural projects, without interfering with the subject too much - or needing a lot of energy for such projects. The Holy Grail is to make something with conceptual value without actually 'making' anything at all. I have a bit of a history with the use of visual appropriation as a key tool for the 'exhausted artist' and this is my first real attempt at sonic appropriation or a kind of musical empathy and metaphor. I'm

virtually using the harmonium as a medical tool – both sonically for the benefit of exercise and drone-bathing – but also psychologically, investigating collapsing systems and coming to terms with the three motivations for enlightenment; old age, sickness and death.

So, the ‘ill’ harmonium, (or ‘Harmonium B’) because it is broken, actually composes music itself. All the composer need do is pump the treadles. If punk was celebrated for its three-chord reductionism then this harmonium is *even more punk* because it has jammed itself on this one five-note chord. On this final track, entitled *Settlement* (because of the chord ‘settling’ and also because it’s a nearby spot on a map) the first half of the track sees me literally forcing different notes out of the machine without even touching the keys. The faster I pedal, the more of the stuck chord you hear. It is even possible to isolate different notes by foot pressure. There’s something beautifully simple about the harmonium giving me this autobiography. It chose those notes itself. All I did was turn them on with my feet. Most of what you hear is a raw field recording.

When I encountered The Eskdalemuir Harmonium(s) (especially the broken version) I was reminded of an infamous ‘ruined piano sanctuary’ in western Australia, nine thousand miles away from Eskdalemuir. The composer Ross Bolleter has, in the last 10 years explored playing with such ‘ruined’ pianos over several exploratory albums. Rain, heat and insects carve authorship on these instruments and end up as collaborators with the composer. The sanctuary is available to visiting composers to use - as are The Eskdalemuir Harmoniums.

Between February 2011 and March 2012 I started to filter several tracks and I quickly realised to avoid navel-gazing it might be wise to get a different perspective on the sounds. At this point I contacted Rutger Zuydervelt, aka *Machinefabriek* and asked if he would be interested in being my collaborator on the project. He did, and we started to process the sounds and alter each other's treatments via soundcloud.com, as I wanted a critical perspective from someone who hadn't seen the machines or the environment I was in.

I've done a lot of virtual collaborations before, as has the massively prolific Rutger. In 1999 I was signed to French electronica label bip-hop who released my first album *Social Electrics* (featuring Matt Elliot and Janeck Schaefer among others, made through a 56k modem). The collaboration with Rutger here was a silver lining on soundcloud because we both had reasonably fast connections allowing the efficient transfer of daily megabytes of lossless audio arriving into our studios in Ayr and Rotterdam. It was a series of contemplative digital jam sessions.

Before I began this project I was unaware of the pioneering Harmonium work made by Sigbjørn Apeland on his album *Glossolalia* (Hubro Music 2011); a set of immersive improvised harmonium recordings made over a decade. I'm almost glad I didn't know of that album's existence prior to recording 'my' harmonium in Eskdalemuir. But if you want a recent primer, Apeland's work is a superb document of postmodern Harmonium composition executed in single takes. Had I known about it, I think it would have influenced how I proceeded or I might have just given up. If *Glossolalia* were a Buddhist teaching, it would now be my 'root text'.

According to *Glossolalia's* sleevenotes, “most harmoniums are old, badly maintained and more or less out of tune” and for most trained musicians this is a problem as the machine is “averse to all kind of virtuosity”.

All sorts of squeaks and whimpers can be found in *Glossolalia*. When I listen to the peripheral noises on Apeland's *Bulder Og Lys* I always think my baby boy is crying nearby. I stop the track and the phantom baby evaporates. *Glossolalia* is a slow but intense record. Wind instruments with ‘lungs’ just don't suit being played fast – and sometimes I prefer just to bathe in their inherent drone. Play a harmonium *fast* and it's like that elephant again, only trying to breakdance.

The Eskdalemuir Harmonium is an assemblage through improvisation. Rutger and myself worked microscopically on the extensive field recordings. Because we are also visual artists, it may come as no surprise that a filmic or ‘modular’ approach to the harmonium composition was the adopted method, and the editing methodology was similar to the workflow of a radio documentary.

My PhD revolves around creative responses to chronic illness, and one aspect of that is to create ‘soporific sonics’ – where tones to aid sleep and rest are cherished prizes, when found. People with CFS-ME (or C.F.S. / C.F.I.D.S. in the USA and Canada) are rarely properly rested. But it is also comforting when the instrument's range and ‘health’ can be said to be in sync with the unwell artist deriving sounds from it. This is a kind of intuitive sonic investigation, or as Dr Sarah Pink would say in academic terms, it is a kind of ‘sensory autoethnography’ – a form of qualitative research, a sounding out of the soulscape.

Sociologically, there is a growing societal movement away from the word 'disabled' toward terms such as 'inclusive' – and I believe there is a parallel in the world of specialist music and sound art. Sounds previously thought of as errors are now being celebrated and the language investigated. Over the last thirty years, despite (or because of) the advent of precise digital recordings and of producers who spend aeons ridding instruments of hums and crackles, there are other producers who are interested *only* in those hums and crackles being left in. In electronic music too - Philip Jeck, Christian Marclay, William Basinski, James Leyland Kirby as *The Caretaker* – and especially Rutger Zuydervelt, all are artists working closely with the aesthetics of detritus.

This is a site-specific project and I wanted the site to be heard in the results. Field recordings and interviews were sourced alongside video and photographic images. The expanded digital edition at www.dooks.org/harmonium has even more images and sounds made in the sessions.

We hope you will enjoy the rattles, rhythms and compressed airs of *The Eskdalemuir Harmonium* and perhaps even visit these wonderful machines yourself before they return to the mossy and damp earth of Eskdalemuir - groaning, wheezing and collapsing on themselves as they fall into the gravitational suck of the earth's core...

Chris Dooks, Alloway, June 2012

5. LP2 SLEEVENOTES: *300 Square Miles of Upwards*

Limited Edition Blue Vinyl LP

Pressed by Curved Pressings London, Edition of 300

Heavyweight full colour card inners

Self-Released by Chris Dooks [www.idioholism.com] and Auntie Helen Records

Launched at Woodend Barn, Banchory, Scotland: 22 August 2013

Layout by Rutger Zuydervelt and Chris Dooks

Sleevenotes:

If you wish to make an apple pie from scratch, you must first invent the universe.

Astrophysicist Carl Sagan sings these words from the grave on a limited edition 7" single, the b-side of which displays engravings copied from The Golden Record, famously mounted on the Voyager probes to the outer solar system.

On her album and multimedia project, *Biophilia*, Icelandic composer and singer Björk informs us that the rate at which our fingernails grow is the same rate at which the earth's Mid-Atlantic Ridge drifts.

In 2009, which was *The International Year of Astronomy*, a jazz-choral piece about sunspots, by a cappella troupe The Chromatics, explained solar rotation: *A strange kind of movement to do a full roll, 25 days in the middle, 36 at the poles...*

I adore music about science. In 2008 Benbecula Records released an LP of my songs entitled *The Aesthetic Animals Album*, where each song referred implicitly or explicitly to biology. One song was titled The Penguin. At the time, I was gripped by the media coverage of Antarctic penguins near the Ross Ice Shelf. They were unable to get back to their chicks because the landscape of ice was rapidly changing due to the worlds largest iceberg blocking their path – a problem, as it was easily over 100 kilometres long. At the time of writing the song, the iceberg had ‘calved’ or jettisoned much of it’s bulk, creating the enigmatically named B15(A), which eventually calved (B)15B. I used information found inside a copy of National Geographic to write the song.

The world’s largest iceberg is B15(A)
And it’s run aground on The McMurdo Sound again.
It is preventing penguins from entering their colonies
It is preventing scientists from carrying out their follies

B15(B), took the kinder route
It shattered on the sea-bed, with minimal repute
Once a motherlode, once leviathan
Disintegrating Iceberg, and iceberg traffic-jam

I spent most of 2012 creating more sonic science vignettes, but not songs in the formal sense, forming instead a backbone of earth-science and astronomy spoken word pieces which eventually resulted in this LP. One might call this suite of works Astrosonic Edutainment. The title *300 Square Miles of Upwards* refers to the area of

Galloway Forest Park in Scotland, most of which is also an internationally accredited Dark Sky Park for observing the night sky. Its northern border is only thirteen miles away from my house.

Side One

Gardening as Astronomy

This is the soundtrack to a twelve-minute film commissioned by Woodend Barn Arts in Banchory, Aberdeenshire, where I was given access to a creative space, a Steinway piano and a wildlife garden. I also had the opportunity to make sound recordings with any visitors to the various indoor and outdoor spaces over a period of 48 hours. The rough brief was to focus around the expansion of the centre's wildlife garden (featured on this LP's front and rear covers).

With all this focus on locality (and the track mentions very British concepts like 'allotments'), it made sense to counterpoint it around something universal, like astronomy.

Could working in a garden count as astronomy? I like the idea of daytime astronomy. I had already used the solar telescope of my local astronomy group during the day, and I already knew that radio telescopes could work during the day, so why not define gardening as astronomy? Or at least call it a kind of 'star-work.'

Defining gardening as astronomy opens up astronomy to all sorts of audiences.

I read somewhere recently that one reason we know that the sun's solar energy peaks in 13-year ejections is because the trunks of felled trees have thicker bark around these periods. Whilst that isn't gardening as such, it is a kind of astronomy that is both informed by modern research, and is at same time rooted (literally) in the earth. As such, it is accessible.

To an extent, this track is following in the footsteps of Hamish Henderson, Alan Lomax and linguistic ethnographers from Edinburgh's School of Scottish Studies (an institution with which I have worked in the past). These researchers and collectors stomped around Scotland with their tape recorders and microphones collating and depositing songs, stories and points of view for the archives of the future. I am influenced by that tradition, but I interfere with the process, producing a sonic artwork rather than straight ethnographic survey.

The Greeks That I Love

Recorded in my Vauxhall Meriva (cars make great recording spaces), I continued the process mentioned previously. This time it was literally one take, with perhaps a couple of post-production edits. The interviewee, John Berry, has a riveting yet relaxing voice.

I used techniques learned in my broadcast days to gently influence him in musing continuously about the night sky. This session was one of my favourites, as John is clearly vocalising a stream of consciousness, but it's not without humour, and the microphone loves his voice.

Continuing the piano theme of the previous track, I used an older recording I had not worked with before, made in the Sutherland village of Helmsdale. The track is heavily influenced by the band Labradford, whose album *E Luxo So* I was listening to a lot. The Greeks features an upright tinkly primary school piano, augmented by other layers in my studio.

Morse Mode

I have a large collection of odd 78 records, one of which is a two-part set of Morse code instructions, getting on for a hundred years old. I also have a broken piano, the third piano to feature on this LP. I wanted to make a piece of music that could actually contain Morse code within the composition, to send some kind of message on the sound waves entering space. I'll leave you to evaluate on whether or not there may be a hidden text inside this track. When I composed this tune, I opened the living room windows wide, not to annoy my neighbours but to think about how sound carries on in space. It leaves my fingers, it leaves the piano, it leaves the room, it hits the tree in the garden, it gets broken up by the wind and so on... at what point does it die?

I have a chronic illness (see www.afme.org.uk), and one of the symptoms is that cognitive processes are impaired. I would like to say that this recording of the piano is one take. Due to illness, it is actually five multi-tracked sessions, with some rehearsal. I listen a lot to Indian Ragas, where relevant scales are applied at different times of the day. My scales are in no way as musically or philosophically complex as Ragas. I tend to choose humble visual patterns with my fingers and have to look down

on the ivories so that I'm not deviating from perhaps five notes. It is on subsequent multi-tracked 'stems' where I then apply sympathetic layers, depending on my different states of illness/health. I layer these stems via the same technique to a total of around five other sessions. It sounds like less, perhaps two to three sessions on the track. But as I say, I'm not a seasoned or fit pianist. However, it is a methodology that is useful for composing when illness threatens creative endeavour. It's a bricolage technique that helps me attempt more complex arrangements from very simple sessions.

Side Two

Conversation with a Boy (album mix)

This is a track made with Francis Cazal (Porzellan), and the result of another residency, this time in my home town of Ayr in the west of Scotland. This version is under half the length of the original, but still preserves the heart of the work featuring the voices of six Ayrshire teenagers from different backgrounds, all speaking about their hopes for the future. The residency became part of a show entitled Lodestone – a word sometimes used to describe the mineral magnetite. Magnetite is used in the tips of compasses, where it pulls to magnetic north. This piece is another way in which I am trying to use local voices with astronomical concepts. It is a sonic partner piece in many ways to the first track on Side A.

I was shortlisted for Galloway Forest Park's Dark Sky residency in 2011-12. It gave me an opportunity to make a work specifically for the launch of the new astronomy park. Given the international potential of astronomy, I wanted to make a spoken word track with someone who is of mixed nationality. Different accents are a feature of this record.

Luckily, I had a Polish friend, the performer Marta Adamowicz, who lived in Ayr. Working with her, I realised how amazing some of the popular constellations sounded in Polish. This seemed important space-wise, as a leading astronomy organisation 'Astronomers without Borders' promote this motto: *One People, One Sky*. I don't want to debate the hemispheres or get into a Bob Marley *One Love* rhetoric, but *One People, One Sky* is a sentiment worth pursuing when the skies don't care for our petty borders.

This is only half the story. I'd had a car crash some two years earlier, right at the start of my PhD (of which this record is part). After I was released from hospital, the first creative thing I did whilst hugging my ribs, was to make several recordings on my equally broken piano. I shelved them, but discovered the technique of playing the piano in the manner that I explored on the track *Morse Mode*. Then I fused the track and Marta's voice together. When I play this back now, I sometimes get visions of the car-crash alongside Marta and stars at the same time.

Pinpricks

Over 2012 I recorded way too many interviews than I could possibly use for this album. So I have released a companion work in the expanded digital version of this record that you may have downloaded by now. It contains sketches and archives recorded mostly at the Ayr campus of the University of The West of Scotland during summer of 2012. One of the interviewees that I felt had a nice and enthusiastic voice was Anna Kennedy, a performing arts student. I featured her purely because of the way she pronounces 'stars' – While I had a microphone pointed at her, I knew immediately I was going to loop the natural rhythms in her voice. This track takes her recollection of stargazing and attempts to turn it into a sonic vortex.

Katrina

Chronically ill people, like any other stratum of society, may need access to the latest discoveries of the universe. But many very sick people find it overwhelming even to watch a TV documentary. One way I've been trying to help overcome this disadvantage, at least in a tiny way, is to locate very short strands of information that are easy to process but are still full of awe – like this: *Today's sunlight is about 30,000 years old. It was made at the height of the last ice age* (spoken to me by Marcus Chown in April 2012, in Edinburgh).

Initially, I was going to record statements like these with music, in the hope that the words became more memorable. Writers like Oliver Sacks have researched the power of music as a 'squatter' – in patients with Alzheimer's Disease, who can

often recall, verbatim, tunes and songs from decades ago, yet are unable to recall their own name, for example. I became so interested in this as a research method that I will be pursuing a separate release in the future regarding this phenomenon.

Without music we are left thematically (and literally) with space - for the final trajectory on this album. It's in Japanese and English, for no good reason other than my wanting, again, to make a track that was local and international at the same time. And so I tracked down a Japanese-Scottish chap called Jamie Jiei Uchima. Born and raised in Japan till eleven, and in Scotland ever since. His voice is beautifully soft in his Galloway lilt and it is fascinating in its Japanese mode.

So, closing the album, you hear just three statements in Japanese and English, donated to me by Marcus Chown and Govert Schilling, authors of *Tweeting the Universe – Tiny Explanations of Very BIG ideas*.

Chris Dooks

Ayr, February 2012

6. LP3 SLEEVENOTES: *CIGA{R}LES*

Limited Edition Transparent Yellow Vinyl LP

Released November 2014, Edition of 300

Heavyweight full colour card inners

Self-Released by Chris Dooks [www.idioholism.com]

Layout by Rutger Zuyderveldt and Chris Dooks

Sleevenotes

This LP eavesdrops on a street not far from a small airport, close to the Scottish town where the poet Robert Burns was born. It also incorporates bagpipes, and by way of surreal contrast, it features thousands of French cicadas. The title *CIGA{R}LES* is a fusion of the word *cigale* (cigar-like cicada) with the Provençal town of *Arles*.

This might sound arbitrary or idiosyncratic, but this LP and the expanded download that accompanies it, is thematically tight: *a composer with physical limitations employs field recording as an experimental intervention in health*.

The project began as a semi-autobiographical *Entente Cordiale* as I recorded material firstly in Scotland, (from my windowsill near to the flight-path of Prestwick Airport) and subsequently in France, birthplace of *Musique Concrète* and the alluring cicada soundscapes of the south.

The idea of flight, whether by flying insect, aeroplane or otherwise, can be a lofty metaphor for those limited by illness. Luckily, artistic practice itself revolves around limitation in that no work of art or music can contain *everything*. From this simple viewpoint it follows that the practice of making any artwork is accomplished by edits, biases and the filtering of information by all sorts of discriminations. This is the process of most creative constructions. Art is bias. One might say even that perception itself is a form of bias unless one is omnipotent. So even before we start to make anything, only a slither of life is going to fit on the page, on the soundtrack, within the sculpture, in the frame and so on...

Everyday life may also impose limits onto artists; problems with budgets, ability, time frame, health, and so on. We would usually assume that problems like these must limit the development or opportunities of an artist. Is this really the case? Whilst I'm not suggesting there is a panacea to remove these particular limits, a valid question does emerge:

To what extent is there any benefit in welcoming unpleasant and inconvenient limitations as part of the process of making a piece? Additionally, does 'predicament' itself co-author work?

I believe if our definition of art (including music and literature) is inclusive enough, perhaps predicament need not be an enemy of the sick or disabled practitioner.

I'll turn to the sounds on the record shortly, but I'd like to expand on this idea of 'predicament'. If the purpose of an artist making work is as suggested, to be a kind of editor, perhaps those limited by illness or other factors are already half-way to their art? Is this one of the few advantages of being an ill practitioner?

Every day, creative acts are launched in diverse circumstances, not all of which appear as favourable. These circumstances are unavoidable bedfellows in the process. Whilst this may reduce the freedom of choice in what is creatively possible, perhaps there is also a sense of relief in only being able to do so much via a small cluster of methods. Freedom of choice in creative projects can frequently cause an agony of choice resulting in procrastination. When illness intervenes, many creative decisions are instantly negated or removed and the kind of shape or potential the artwork now has, is already part-sculpted or part-drafted through externally imposed 'disadvantages'. The chronically ill practitioner knows what the work *won't* be at least. So some of that choice is simplified, and some time and energy is saved, even if creative opportunities now seem depressingly small-scale due to circumstances.

I am a cultural practitioner limited by my failing physical (and to an extent mental) health. But when I accepted (if not embraced) my limits, I was able to exploit and refine limitations. Whilst this won't be possible for all ill practitioners, I did manage to implement my limitations into a collection of individualistic wellbeing methodologies. Field recording is one of a number of methods I employ in an attempt to make the everyday less ordinary. This LP investigates and showcases the results of this *modus operandi*.

Side One a.k.a. 'The Scottish Side'

Referendum

I find myself standing in the middle of bushes in a park close to my house, trying to discreetly record several bagpipe bands rehearsing concurrently for Ayr's *Pipes in The Park*. With my field-recorder I am trying to capture, even 'create' music without formally 'composing' it. I can hear an out-of-synch cacophony of pipes and drums to my far left and right. Have I discovered a ready-made soundscape by serendipity? Can I appropriate this soundscape as a composition?

Two traditional bagpipe bands attempt to out-rehearse each other in short bursts and passages with no over-arching plan as to what is happening. It is a purely spontaneous and cacophonous accident that I walked into. But by imagining this accident is actually experimental music, the kind of music I listen to, it suddenly sounds *composed*, reminding me of Julia Wolfe's piece for nine bagpipes *LAD*, or triggering associations with Steve Reich's many phase pattern experiments.

In this context, my field-recordings appear as cousins of niche but recognised musical genres. At the same time, they remain in my arsenal of illness-compatible tactics, in this case, as a form of 'sonic appropriation'. Had I come across this recording as a stranger, perhaps in the context of contemporary sound-art, I think I would have assumed it was composed, or at least set-up, being so-called 'experimental' music, not an accidental and fragmented *mash-up* of pipe-band anthems such as *Flower of Scotland* or *Amazing Grace*. It is a mash-up, but is made unknowingly, completely live.

It is perhaps ethically appropriate that I'm not bootlegging the piper's *tunes*. The band's off-cuts are my prime-cuts. Because of this, perhaps I can claim the soundscape as *my* 'composition', and not just a recording. Merely by moving a stereo mic, I alter this soundscape. Therefore, the mic becomes an 'instrument' of sorts and composition occurs.

I postulate the possibility of 'authoring' musical compositions by *when* and *where* we place a microphone, in a curatorial sense. We know field-recordings have become lodged in musical history. There's the association with electro-acoustic composition and a sub-history of field recording *for* and *as* music. Pierre Schaefer was just one of a number of composers whose work evolved alongside the rise of the phonograph and the portable tape recorder, making field recording possible. At the same time, Schaefer was one of the first *manipulators* of recorded sound. It is because of his manipulations that he was able to place his work into the vocabulary of new musical families; *Acousmatic Sound*, *Musique Concrète* and later, *Electroacoustic composition*. But can field recording be music on its own? Is it diluted when augmented by editing and processing? *Referendum* contains both 'pure' and heavily treated field recordings.

Recently, at a symposium on field recording, I asked Chris Watson this question. In 2013, Watson is arguably the world's most famous field recordist. How did he feel about the validity of layering field recordings with other musical structures in recent work? Did this 'reduce' or somehow devalue the 'pure' field recordings? I asked him about a piece: *The Signalman's Mix of El Tran Fantasma* released by Touch in 2011.

CD: On some of your recent releases I've noticed that you've started layering sine waves and other musical structures on top of what were, previously, rawer field recordings. I know you've worked in experimental music over the years, but I wondered if you have any thoughts on field recording as music as opposed to when you are using it as one of many elements?

CW: *I regard it as music. That's it. I don't discriminate between the two, even when I'm supplying something as I did last week to a computer games company, they asked me to deliver 'a track' so I don't discriminate. And it does go back a long way when I first got interested in it, you know, tape recorders and speakers. Just tools to document stuff. I try not to pigeonhole things.*

On this album, the track *Referendum* attempts to demonstrate how a raw field recording can be evaluated as a piece of music in itself. A strategy for the exhausted or sick composer. So it is virtually raw for the first two minutes. In order to see this in clear focus, the latter half is deliberately heavily treated and edited, sparring with the first couple of minutes 'pure' field-work by developing into intensely edited structures. So the start of the piece is a virtually untouched recording, and is placed there as an example of an illness methodology, but I felt well enough to spend time editing and refining these opposing elements in the track, which fight it out.

Very soon, *sparring* will dictate Scotland's independent future in the upcoming referendum in 2014. Ideas of Scottishness and national pride may clash like competing pipe-bands. In the same way that artist Jeremy Deller persuaded brass bands in the North of England to play Acid House anthems, this track ultimately investigates a sonic

Scottish identity in a time of political flux. I like the fact that a work that started out as a so-called 'illness' methodology becomes one that is about life for many audiences.

Birdies

Orgiastic seagulls driven into a feeding frenzy are the subject here, made with my (then) one-year old son, throwing so much bread into the air that the gulls ganged-up in a huge flock. I had my recorder on a long pole, right in the middle of the action, a position that would have been impossible to extend my arm into. There's a lot to be said for placing one's microphone on an extendable stick as it quickly enables the practitioner to 'milk' one location for as much variety as possible, placing it where our ears cannot be. It is not just a method for the energy-addled field recordist, it is also practical. It is a model used by filmmakers where material is shot for location practicalities and rarely in sequence - and on a personal level, this an echo of my 'past life' as a 'healthier' TV director.

Microwave, BT Homehub and Boiler Circuits

This track is less than ten seconds long, and it was made by wandering around my home with a coil-induction microphone to see if I could add further interest to my life by listening to all of the electrical sounds in the house. By being *super*-local, I was asking myself – *what other ways can I eavesdrop on my living space to expand the parameters of this reduced existence?* I failed. The howl of the Wi-Fi signal from the British Telecom Broadband Home Hub was ear-splitting enough to abandon this experiment.

In November 2012 I spent an entire month attempting to ‘objectively’ or ‘democratically’ record sounds from several windowsills of my house during eight-hour sessions. Could placing a humble field-recorder on a windowsill be an interesting approach for people who are shut-in or shut-away? As the outside world often becomes unavailable for chronically ill people, this practice invites some of it in.

If for any reason we can’t be *in* the outside world physically, can we at least move a soundscape from the street and skies to our beds, chairs, walls and eardrums?

By employing even a subtle form of editing or layering of local field recordings, a housebound sufferer of a chronic illness now becomes an explorer from said windowsill. In the same way writers like James Joyce (or more recently) Jon Macgregor explode minutiae into riveting, spiralling fragments of greater and refined magnification – digital recording and editing enable such a stretching and exploding of one’s frankly *boring* life into a reassessment of ‘the everyday’. This is a vital point for the housebound sufferer. Or as the San Francisco Buddhists of the sixties would say “Shit Happens. But it isn’t really shit.”

Street noise coupled with aeroplanes flying around Prestwick Airport eight kilometres away is the central drone. Cars arrive and depart. Birds flap near the recorder and shriek in the dawn chorus. Distant helicopters fly women in labour from the Clyde Islands to Crosshouse hospital in Kilmarnock. Neighbours gossip about my visible microphone, a skateboard rattles and football is kicked. A little girl talks about

how long I have left our pumpkins to rot on the doorstep post-Halloween. A crow rhythmically shrieks to someone nailing a fence. Other neighbours have a floor polished and a kitchen installed - the sound of which blends into the gentle roar of the A77 to Glasgow, a kilometre away. But in the main, it is the frankly surprisingly beautiful sound of distant aeroplanes that dominates. At night, I take the recorder to bed, sleeping to the world I simply caught on the window-ledge, which I sometimes can't be *in*.

Through this experiment I feel like I've lived a little better. As a family we were about to go to the South of France and so I pack my recording unit into the suitcase...

Side Two aka 'The Provençal Side'

CIGA{R}LES

This is a travelogue, and takes up all of side two. Essentially, it contains fragments of field recordings of insects (cicadae) overlaid with instrumental pieces made in my studio, but derived exclusively from field recordings. Much of this piece involves the mixing of cicada calls prominently in the music, faithful to the phenomena of encountering these shrill insects in the south of France, the sounds of which can dominate a local soundscape for miles. It might seem a long way from the bagpipes of side one, but in reality, the pitch, rhythms and sheer volume of these insects has a great deal in common with the bagpipes. Like bagpipes, they polarise listeners, who either love or hate them - there appears to be little middle ground.

In Provence, I wanted to create more exercises of limited means. Arles has a major photography festival plus a live street music one - *Les Suds à Arles* sees many buskers and live musicians hit town. I stuck within one square kilometre of our rented apartment to record short snatches of these performers. I also experimented with some Provençal windowsill recording.

One methodology for the exhausted artist is to place oneself at the centre of where the action is, and as a result not have to travel much to gather a wide cultural palette. Add to this that festivals bring the world to one stage, and I need not grieve that illness curtailed my Marco Polo potential. Consequently, the middle section of this long piece features a soundscape of buskers from all over Europe who were performing fairly close to each other.

Festivals can be a useful way for ill practitioners to 'collect' rare cultural scenarios in one session. My material was made as ethically as possible: buskers were paid, and appear like the pipers of side one - i.e. for a small fraction of time. It's the mix I am more interested in. This section has a 'promenade' feel where the sounds overlap – and at one point there is material recorded in nearby Beaucaire where you can hear horns of boats blasting, as the populace celebrate the 100th birthday of an old barge, mixed together with the bustle of the buskers and sounds of the flea-market *brocante*.

But it was cicadas, *or les cigales* I spent most of my time pursuing. It had been a warm holiday full of new experiences and these loud flying insects became an

obsession for me. Whenever my two year old was sleeping, I collected these *cicadas* as I would term them. The extended download of this record contains an hour-long montage of raw cicada mating calls which are not produced like crickets, by the rubbing of hind legs, but instead by vibrating collective abdomens *en masse*. The sound is so loud, the insects have to close their 'ears' whilst performing. It is when the insects are more distant that they create a collective 'sonic curtain' of white noise. The process here was soporific: the rhythm and timbre of this soundscape calmed my overactive system down as much of the time I am flooded with adrenaline to get through the day.

Two months later, in a colder, wetter and frankly darker west of Scotland, I realised that my editing of the material was still positively affecting my health. I am very sensitive to sound so it's no surprise that I started to consciously 'self-medicate' with these recordings. As I edited the noises, I felt as if I also played back a fraction of the state of mind with which the recordings were made; warm and bright. I became a little warmer and brighter. This is a real argument for the value of an art practice.

Obviously recalling nice memories has a pleasant effect on the individual, but I find an art practice can prolong this further, forging a much deeper level of association between identifying an activity as meaningful, and then working on it consciously. My own work might be played a thousand times while editing it and consequently some of the effects are extended. I was aware that these insect soundscapes made me happy, and so I was living in the echo of that time again via the making of this record and the playing of the bright yellow disc.

Even as I type these words, I think of sitting in the sun listening to these insects, and the change this had on my brain and body chemistry. Right now, the sweet dregs of this (busman's) holiday ricochet inside me. It helps that other memories are attached to the experience, that as a family we all had some fun in 'Arles 2012' but by utilising the association with the heavily anchored sound in my head (anchored because of repeated listens/edits), I have made, by accident, a self-initiated psychophysical tool of wellbeing. It is tailored for me but the principle behind it could be adopted for quite a range of people.

Erroneously, I thought I might have created the only vinyl project that heavily features cicadas. It turns out the composer Luc Ferrari (and no doubt others) got there decades before me. On Ferrari's field recording masterwork *Presque Rien*, I was both elated and depressed to hear how large sections of my track are very close to Ferrari's former Yugoslavian cicada / beach piece *Le lever du jour au bord de la mer*. I'll be writing about him in the PhD thesis which accompanies this record (the final in of a trilogy of three – see www.idioholism.com).

As a kind of Coda to the holiday (and now this record) we spent the last three days at Hotel Dieu, in Paris – a hotel in a working hospital, next to Notre Dame cathedral. The artist Luke Jerram had installed a piano inside the grounds for anyone to play. Fountains splashed loudly nearby. I took my iPhone out my pocket and recorded thirty minutes of an improvisation on it. Someone undergoing chemotherapy was listening and clapped afterwards. I went to talk to her. She loved watching my son cavort in the fountain near the piano. At the time of writing, I'm not sure if she is still alive, but this record is dedicated to her.

Chris Dooks, Alloway, Scotland

March 2013

Chapter 9

Contribution to Knowledge and Conclusion of Project

Preface

1. Contribution to knowledge, an introduction: the terrain of arts practice as research
2. Contribution to knowledge: published vinyl records and download packages.
3. Contribution to knowledge: papers and appearances
4. Contribution to knowledge: terminology
5. Contribution to knowledge: The Exhaustion Symposium
6. Conclusion: A self-reflective account of the successes and failures of the project

Preface

The purpose of this concluding chapter is to ascertain the project's contribution to knowledge. Within arts practice as research, the notion of what constitutes 'knowledge' is contested and constantly being re-mapped due to the emergent and contingent nature of the doctoral qualification in studio art practice, and similar studies and developments within broader academic arts practices. Within the exegeses of artist-researchers, one may frequently observe repetitive caveats, justifications and rationales for the field of artistic practice to be studied at doctoral level. This is less frequently observed in doctoral projects in the so-called 'hard sciences'. However, some text offering conclusions and identifying 'new knowledge' is still important, given the experimental scope of what may constitute an artist's PhD. Therefore, in looking at the concept of 'new knowledge' or evaluating my 'contribution to knowledge' I will outline four connected facets of how this project may have contributed to the field of arts practice as research.

Firstly, I will examine the literature of some key Practice as Research(PaR) publications. Secondly, I will audit the literal objects that now exist, both commercially and privately as published records of the process, and list exhibitions and public presentations of the records undertaken to date. Thirdly, I lay out my contributions to the literature of the fields which the project has addressed, the conferences where I have presented work drawn from the project, papers published, and briefly re-cap the descriptive terms that have been generated by the process – a) *Idioholism*, b) *The Fragmented Filmmaker*, c) *The Exhausted Artist* and d) *M.E.thodologies*. Fourthly, I will devote some time exploring one important presentation in particular (at a Wellcome

Trust funded symposium on *Exhaustion* at The University of Kent) and my involvement with it as one of the potential successes of the research. I shall conclude the project. I will evaluate the methodology and recap on the idea of formulae and my use of triangulation within in a creative and experimental context.

1. Contribution to knowledge Introduction: The terrain of arts practice as research

The first thing to say is that projects like this one do not deal with empirical or statistical knowledge. Robin Nelson, in *Practice as Research in the Arts* (Nelson, 2013), puts it succinctly:

Data-based approaches are not ...typical of PaR⁶³ [Practice as Research] and its mode of knowing is not of a propositional (descriptive-declarative) or falsifiable kind. Thus anyone who insists on research undertaken in accord with 'the scientific method' (whatever exactly it might entail) as the sole basis for knowledge is not likely to accept arts PaR.

(Nelson 2013, p50)

Barbara Boldt uses a logical construct from Martin Heidegger to suggest that to PaR is a rational mode of knowing:

In *Being and Time* (1966) Martin Heidegger sets out to examine the particular form of knowledge that arises from our handling of materials and processes. Heidegger argues that we do not come to "know" the world theoretically through contemplative knowledge in the first instance. Rather, we come to know the world theoretically only after we have come to understand it through handling. Thus the new can be seen to emerge in the involvement with materials, methods, tools and

⁶³ I will use PaR as an abbreviation of 'Practice as Research' from now on.

the idea of practice. It is not just the representation of an already formed idea nor is it achieved through conscious attempts to be original.

(Boldt, in Barrett and Boldt, 2010, p30)

Estelle Barrett speaks about 'situated knowledge' within research, specifically, that arts PaR may champion marginalised causes. This is particularly pertinent to the 'gentle activist' qualities of this project akin to the examples we saw in Chapter 3 ('Artists in Extremis') regarding arts in an illness/disability framework, allowing for the expression of 'alternative realities':

Because creative arts research is often motivated by emotional, personal and subjective concerns, it operates not only on the basis of explicit and exact knowledge, but also on that of tacit knowledge. An innovative dimension of this subjective approach to research lies in its capacity to bring into view, particularities of lived experience that reflect alternative realities that are either marginalised or not yet recognised in established theory and practice.

(Barrett, in Barrett and Boldt, 2010, p.143)

The sense of intuition and plasticity of method as a viable and valid mode of research within artistic PaR is posited by Sim, in a quote we encountered earlier in the chapter on bricolage (Chapter 4, p.88). In terms of how one may arrive at new knowledge within an artistic process, such knowledge may not be visible when beginning PaR.

The sense of improvisation that bricolage carries appeals to the postmodern theorist, since it suggests an arbitrary, undetermined quality to creative activity in which the end is not specified in advance. Where a modern thinker might see lack of order or method, his postmodern counterpart would see a welcome exercise of spontaneity.

(Sim, 2005, p.178)

‘New’ knowledge and originality *per se* may not necessarily be the same thing. Professor William H Calvin at the University of Washington, who writes on climate change, evolution and cognition, emphasises that the quality of originality is more important than the ‘newness’ of an original thought or contribution to knowledge in this simple example:

How to think what no one has ever thought before: The short answer is to take a nap and dream about something. Our dreams are full of originality. Their elements are all old things, our memories of the past, but the combinations are original. Combinations make up in variety what they lack in quality, as when we dream about Socrates driving a bus in Brooklyn and talking to Joan of Arc about baseball. Our dreams get time, place, and people all mixed up.

(Calvin, in Matson and Brockman, 1995, p.151)

Staying with the mind (and body), there is one author that the first-person researcher frequently uncovers within the field of artistic research. In pursuing the

ethnography of the self, French phenomenological philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961) is here cited by Havi Carel in *Illness* (Carel, 2010). In the following passage Carel argues, via the observations of Merleau-Ponty, that subjectivity, in which arts practice is rooted, is, firstly, an inevitable aspect of ‘embodied’ research. Secondly, she argues that the subjective mind *is* the body: inseparable from a previously ‘dualistic’ and separate Cartesian view.

Merleau-Ponty sees the body and perception as the seat of personhood, or subjectivity. At root, a human being is a perceiving and experiencing organism, intimately inhabiting and immediately responding to her environment. To think of a human being is to think of a perceiving, feeling and thinking animal, rooted within a meaningful context and interacting with things and people within its surrounding. By taking this approach, Merleau-Ponty responds to a previous, intellectualist (as he calls it) definition of the human being provided by the seventeenth-century French philosopher René Descartes (1596-1650). Descartes defined us as thinking, abstract souls who temporarily and contingently occupy a physical body. Descartes’s approach is known as “dualism” because it postulates two different substances: spatial or extending substances such as physical objects, and thinking substances such as minds.

Merleau-Ponty’s aim was to correct this erroneous view and, while avoiding the materialist reduction of mind to matter, to emphasise the inseparability of mind and body, of thinking and perceiving. His

approach can be thought of as holistic with respect to the human being.

We cannot divide a person into a mental and a physical part, because the two are *de facto* inseparable. Any mental activity must have some physical action underlying it (for example, some neuron firing in the brain). It is impossible, on Merleau-Ponty's view, to think of a purely mental action because mental activity, abstract as it may be, is always embodied.

(Carel, 2008, pp.20-21)

What can we ascertain from these arguments? Firstly, we may suggest that to pursue PaR is not necessarily to be dealing with independently verifiable empirical evidence, and that PaR outcomes are unlikely to form conclusions based on statistical or readily quantifiable data. Next we can solidify the claim that in the context of an artist's doctorate, 'knowledge' may be generated through experience. I would go one step further and argue that the relationship between experience and knowledge requires an element of reflexivity, whether written down or presented in some other form. This manifests in PaR as a praxis.

For example, in my case, the resulting form of my praxis has become the combination of this exegesis alongside physical objects (records). Next - and this is a point that is particularly important for 'the exhausted artist' - we may say that PaR opens up a potentially creative space for minorities and marginalised groups to pursue their work at a doctoral level. This will inevitably make some artists' doctorates experimental in form, balanced with a need to

be negotiated within the PhD audit and assessment process. Furthermore, we can say that artists-as-researchers are likely to pursue an adaptable methodology, one in which not only requires a degree of plasticity to cognise intuitive, emotional, and sensory aspects of research – but one in which crucially, the research outcomes may not be predicted in advance. Following this, when arguing for a ‘contribution to knowledge’ Calvin argues that originality is not difficult *per se*, but the quality of that originality is paramount (Calvin, in Matson and Brockman, 1995, p.151) Put another way, one may say that it is easy to posit an original idea, but less easy to posit a contribution to *knowledge*. Finally in looking closer to work which is about one’s own life experience, it is impossible to divorce the inevitable subjectivity of such research being ‘embodied’ and ‘situated’.

2. Contribution to knowledge: Published vinyl records and download packages



Illustration: The Idioholism Vinyl Trilogy (Image: Dooks, Zuydervelt, 2014) 3x12"LP designed by Chris Dooks, layout by Rutger Zuydervelt, artwork produced between 2010-2013

Introduction

Three expansive twelve-inch records have been produced within the doctoral process. The published records offer a 'literal' contribution to knowledge in the sense that these records are now within the public sphere, released over three years. I have released them separately during the doctoral process to learn from both the successes and pitfalls of doing so for each subsequent release and as a necessary part of praxis. In late 2011, *The Eskdalemuir Harmonium* was released, one year later in 2012 (and with a second launch in 2013), *300 Square Miles of Upwards* was released). In 2014, *CIGA{R}LES* was released, and finally, in late 2014, all three records are released in an imprint of 25-30 as a limited edition trilogy. In addition, ten copies of the entire trilogy

have been packaged together in laser-cut wooden boxes that double as wall-hung storage units for the records. It is this version that will be submitted for academic appraisal. In terms of the public edition, customers may purchase individual records - or one of the limited edition collections of all three records primarily through *bandcamp*⁶⁴.

I've deliberately not titled records in the trilogy 'part one', 'part two' and so on, because it is irksome for some buyers being obligated to purchase the other parts. The grouping of the trilogy of the records is important for the critical, holistic and conceptual nature of the project - the 'idioholistic whole' as an enterprise, but as a record buyer it is annoying to own something as a 'part two' without a 'part one'. As a result, I've tried to make these objects both separate and connected enough to work in two ways; as individual projects and as a thematic set.

⁶⁴ <http://chrisdooks.bandcamp.com>

The Idioholism Vinyl Trilogy: An audit of all the works

1a) 12" LP: *The Eskdalemuir Harmonium* (Dooks / Zuyderveldt, 2011)



Published by Komino Records, Toronto, 2011, edition of 300

Catalogue Number: KOM1N0-004

Form: Red Vinyl LP with two free downloads with every copy

Digital files available as FLAC + ALAC + MP3 320 KBPS

Link: <http://kominorecords.com/site/news/portfolio/k0m1n0-004>

Public launch: Centre for Contemporary Arts, Glasgow, 11 Dec 2012. Lecture based on the sleevenotes of the record, with two HD films projected, two turntables.

Purchased by The British Library Sound Archive, London in 2014

Tracklisting

A1. *The Pike Knowes The Loupin' Stanes* 12:47

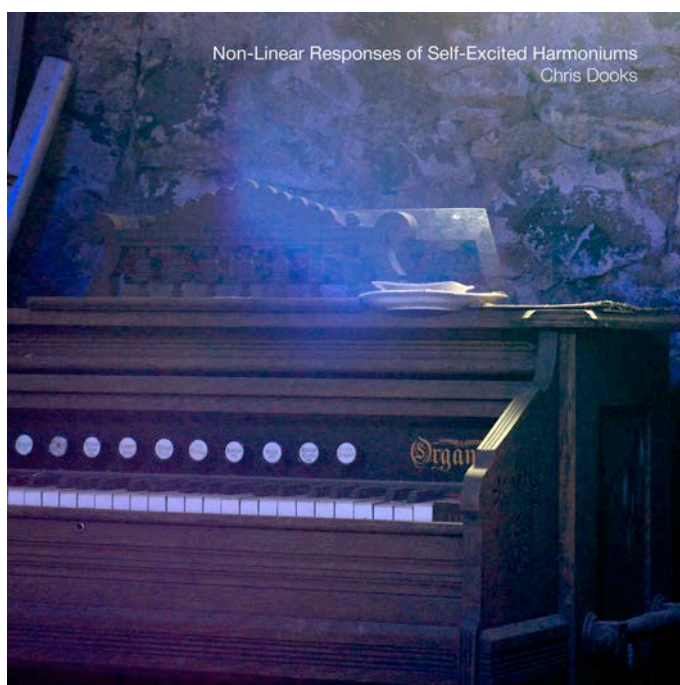
A2. *Betamax and Dictaphones* 5:14

B1. *Ewe Knowe The Girdle Stanes* 12:22

B2. *Settlement* 4:36

1b) *The Eskdalemuir Harmonium* - Bonus Material when bought with the LP:

***Non-Linear Responses of Self-Excited Harmoniums* (Dooks, 2011)**



Published by Komino Records as part of *The Eskdalemuir Harmonium* download

Another version with bonus items is published by the artist ([link below](#))

Catalogue Number: KOM1N0-004 (same as LP)

FLAC + ALAC + MP3 320 KBPS (from Komino Records)

Separate link which divorces this E.P. from the Komino published version with further formats in FLAC + ALAC + MP3 320 KBPS + MP3 V0 + AAC + OGG VORBIS available from:

<https://chrisdooks.bandcamp.com/album/non-linear-responses-of-self-excited-harmoniums-2011>

Purchased by The British Library Sound Archive, London in 2014

Tracklisting

1. *Steady States and Transient Oscillations* 04:15
2. *Aerodynamic Excitation of the Harmonium Reed* 01:48
3. *The Motion of Air-Driven Free Reeds* 06:33

Two bonus films in the download (from the bandcamp link only):

- a) *Betamax and Dictaphones* (Dooks, 2011) and
- b) *Steady States and Transient Oscillations* (Dooks, 2010)

The two films use the photographs included on the inner sleeve, in a digital rostrum process which effectively animates them over the spoken word track (in the case of *Betamax and Dictaphones*) or from pseudo super-8mm film footage navigating the nearby 'Loupin Stanes' stone circle.

2) 12" LP: *300 Square Miles of Upwards* (Dooks, 2012)



Published by:

Auntie Helen, Woodend Barn Arts Ltd and the University of The West of Scotland, Ayr,
2011, edition of 300

Catalogue Number: FRAGFILM001

Form: Blue Vinyl + Digital Copy + HD Film, Full Colour Inner and Outer Sleeves on Pearl
Card Stock & Photographic Essay and Sleeve notes

Digital edition: files available as FLAC + ALAC + MP3 320 KBPS + MP3 V0 + AAC + OGG
VORBIS

Link: <https://chrisdooks.bandcamp.com/album/300-square-miles-of-upwards-2013-blue-vinyl-digital-album-hd-film>

Public launch: 23rd August 2013, Wooden Barn Arts Ltd, Banchory (the record was
available in 2012 via the bandcamp site)

Purchased by The British Library Sound Archive, London in 2014

Tracklisting

A1. *Gardening as Astronomy* 10:24

A2. *The Greeks That I Love* 02:37

A3. *Morse Mode* 04:47

B1. *Conversation With a Boy* [version] 05:50

B2. *Gwiazdozbiór Andromedy* 05:12

B3. *Pinpricks* 05:23

B4. *Katrina* 01:37

Bonus Digital Only Tracks:

1. *Calibre Private Press Female Twinkle Twinkle Little Star* (bonus) 01:38

2. *Calibre Private Press Male Twinkle Twinkle Little Star* (bonus) 01:35

The bonus tracks involved the reproduction of two anonymous ‘private press’ records dated unknown (likely 1960s) singing ‘twinkle twinkle little star’ in a fairground recording booth.

Bonus HD Film *Gardening as Astronomy*, (Dooks, 2011) (digital only).

3) 12" LP *CIGA{R}LES* (Dooks, 2014)



Published by:

Auntie Helen and the University of The West of Scotland, Ayr, 2011 edition of 300

Catalogue Number: FRAGFILM002

Form: Yellow Vinyl + Digital Copy, Full Colour Inner and Outer Sleeves on Pearl Card

Stock & Photographic Essay and Sleeve notes

Digital edition: files available as FLAC + ALAC + MP3 320 KBPS + MP3 V0 + AAC + OGG

VORBIS

Link: <https://chrisdooks.bandcamp.com/album/ciga-r-les-2014-yellow-vinyl-extended-download-package>

Purchased by The British Library Sound Archive, London in 2014

Tracklisting

A1. *Referendum* 07:53

A2. *Birdies* 00:40

A3. *Microwave BT Homehub and Boiler Circuits* 00:08

A4. *The Loaning* 08:09

B1. *CIGA{R}LES* 18:17

Bonus Digital Only Tracks:

*Près 60 Minutes de Cigales Provençales*⁶⁵ 01:00:05 and *Referendum* mp4 movie 08:00

Près 60 Minutes de Cigales Provençales features the non-processed sounds of French cicadas as raw field recordings and *Referendum*, the first track on CIGA{R}LES was used as a soundtrack to a *Year of Natural Scotland* commission (as a film) in 2013.

CIGA{R}LES was informally released in September 2014 via social media to friends and will be launched officially in 2015 in Ayr and hopefully at some point in Arles, France where most of side two was recorded.

⁶⁵ *Près 60 Minutes de Cigales Provençales* was broadcast via the Glasgow-based audio arts fm radio project *Radiophrenia* in April 2015 www.radiophrenia.scot [accessed 1st May 2015]

3. Contribution to knowledge: Papers and appearances

Due to health problems, I found travelling to give paper presentations very hard during the doctoral process. However, I did present aspects of the work at a handful of academic institutions between 2011 and 2014 that resulted in one of the papers (*300 Square Miles of Upwards, Tales from a Dark Sky Park*⁶⁶) being published in an anthology (*Heavenly Discourses*, Sophia Press, University of Wales, to be published in December 2014). I also gave some informal talks during the process – one on ‘mashup culture’ at the CCA in 2011, which was related to my interests in bricolage, and I was also on an invited panel at the same institution in 2012, looking at how artists may respond to the collapsing economy. There, my presentation focused on *physical* collapse as the basis of responding to this situation. During the doctoral process I also received a grant from Creative Scotland as part of *The Year of Natural Scotland* 2013, where I produced an ‘artist-feature film’ *Tiny Geographies* (Dooks, 2013) over a three month residency. When asked to speak about my working method, the vinyl trilogy featured in this context and I presented some of the records I had already made at public talks in Banchory, Aberdeenshire to illustrate such working methods (note: *Tiny Geographies*⁶⁷ is not part of this project).

In the following section I will briefly describe three conferences/symposia that I appeared at, before reporting in more detail on involvement with The University of Canterbury’s conference on exhaustion in October 2013 funded by the Wellcome Trust.

⁶⁶ audio version can be streamed from <https://chrisdooks.bandcamp.com/album/tales-from-a-dark-sky-park-2011>

⁶⁷ See www.tinygeographi.es

Presentations / conferences attended were:

i) Presentation at *Blueprint for a Bogey* at The Gallery of Modern Art, Glasgow (GoMA) on the 24 March 2011: 6.00 – 7.30 pm. Whilst not strictly about the records, I was asked by GoMA Glasgow to respond to an exhibition (*Blueprint for a Bogey*) about playful working methodologies of artists. I used much of my doctoral work to illustrate how someone with CFS-ME could still make meaningful works using economical and playful methods.

ii) *Heavenly Discourses*, 14-16 October 2011 was a symposium at Bristol University and a more straightforward academic presentation. The symposium was centred on the relationship between astronomy and cultural forms that promised to '*bring together scholars to examine the relationship between the heavens and culture through the arts, literature, religion and philosophy, both in history and the present.*'⁶⁸

At this point I was presenting my plans to make a record that became LP2 - and the talk was based on the title of LP2: *300 Square Miles of Upwards, Tales of a Dark Sky Park*. This was a lecture that became in part the sleevenotes of that record. My presentation was based on collating examples of 'astrosonic edutainment' – a phrase I coined to map of the territory and history of artists and musicians primarily singing about science. As mentioned earlier, that paper will be published by Sophia Press (part of The University of Wales) in 2015 in an anthology based on the symposium.

iii) *Sound Thought 2014*, 10th January 2014 – Centre for Contemporary Arts, Glasgow. *Sound Thought* is Glasgow University's annual music research symposium. Here I

⁶⁸ <http://www.heavenlydiscourses.org>

presented a paper 'Introducing the Idioholism Vinyl Trilogy' which was based around the entire project.

iv) *One Day Symposium/Workshop on Exhaustion*, University Of Kent, Canterbury.

The fourth – and possibly most important conference in relation to the cultural aspects of CFS-ME follows shortly, in some necessary depth and contextualises my contribution to knowledge in relation to the academic field of medical humanities. I was the only practice-based speaker in the symposium *On Exhaustion*, and I was also the only speaker with CFS-ME. It is therefore necessary to survey this conference more expansively. Before we enter that overview, related to the papers and terms forged by the process, is a collection of key terms and phrases the project has generated. After I present these terms, I will return to the University of Kent event from October 2013.

4. Contribution to knowledge: Terminology

1. The Fragmented Filmmaker
2. Idioholism
3. M.E.thodologies
4. The Exhausted Artist

It may be worthwhile to assemble and define the four terms and phrases that I developed and deployed within this research project. They are also part of the ‘contribution to knowledge’ of the project. They may read slightly as if they were part of a manifesto (see Chapter 7, Idioholism).

1. The Fragmented Filmmaker / Fragmented Film

The Fragmented Filmmaker is a term I have developed to describe a practitioner pursuing an art practice derived from filmmaking. The end result of his/her art practice is loosely related to film, but does not generate a film. The end result may be a unified collection of aggregates, such as the expansive 12” vinyl record, artwork and sleevenotes. Whilst developing the project, it occurred to me that despite not labelling myself a filmmaker for over a decade, the urge to collate and unify soundtracks, visual art and texts is not wholly divorced from filmmaking and has created a trilogy of ‘fragmented films’ as vinyl records. The idea that I might still be a kind of filmmaker took me by surprise during the doctoral process. Therefore a ‘Fragmented Filmmaker’ is myself or any other film practitioner who previously had a relationship with filmmaking and now works in the embers of that field, reconstructing

'filmic ingredients' into other forms (such as but not with exclusivity to, vinyl records).

2. Idioholism

Literally an idiosyncratic form of holism. It originates from the point of view that three low-energy art practices 'triangulated' by any practitioner in the first person, would, by such (loose) 'triangulation of practice', potentially result in an overlapping and involving 'holistic' existence than in the practitioner's current life. Idioholism is only concerned with a practical improvement of both breadth and range of experience - within a practitioner's life. To stand a chance of being effective, the three art practices are pursued with a deliberate attempt to be different enough from each other, so that a kind of 'proto-syllabus' occurs and a sense of engagement with the world (crucially whilst still ill) may become possible. The user can define the three art practices and the chapter on idioholism expands and proposes the concept as fully as possible.

3. M.E.thodologies

The methodologies of someone with CFS-ME. Initially this term may be applied to the techniques explained in the sleeve notes of this project and in the chapter on bricolage. In a wider sense *M.E.thodologies* could be simply defined as the conscious adaptations of someone with CFS-ME generated in day to day living with the illness, usurping the condition, or perhaps applied to formal research. M.E.thodologies may be a blanket term for coping strategies in the widest sense - for those with low energy challenges. They are a form of embodied learned experiences (as opposed to lateral

thinking) resulting in actions that are compatible with the illness. They are not panaceas.

4. The Exhausted Artist

This term could be used outside of CFS-ME if necessary. In the first instance, the exhausted artist is myself, but when applied to the idea that some of the examples in this research project could work outside of my idiosyncratic research, then the exhausted artist could be defined as anyone with CFS-ME (or similar conditions) who has an interest in cultural and creative responses to their predicament.

5. Contribution to knowledge:

The Exhaustion Symposium - University of Kent, October 2013

The following section is included to illustrate the ways in which my research has made a contribution to knowledge in a multi-disciplinary academic context.

On Friday the 25th of October 2013, a one-day symposium on the subject of exhaustion, funded by the Wellcome Trust, was held in Canterbury, by the University of Kent. It was organised by Dr Anna Katharina Schaffner (Comparative Literature, Kent). In regard to contribution to knowledge, my presentation “The M.E.thodologies of the Fragmented Filmmaker” (an introduction to my working methods of this research project) was presented before a panel of researchers from medical humanities and literature departments of universities as well as Sir Simon Wessely, Chair of Psychological Medicine, King’s College, London - and other speakers who I will outline below.

The speakers

Dr Schaffner opened the day with an overview of models of exhaustion alongside definitions from the 1880s to the present, before culturally locating terms such as Chronic Fatigue Syndrome and ‘burnout’ - headings that would be used in many of the papers presented in the day, one of which would be mine. In this way, there was a direct contribution to knowledge – the dissemination of my work into its first academic audience. Subsequently, one of the speakers Dr Jenny Laws (Durham University) has taken the *Idioholism Vinyl Trilogy* as an example of her ongoing lectures

on the ‘active patient’, presenting the project as an example to students⁶⁹.

During the day, themes and questions emerged such as:

Does exhaustion have an isolated history?

Is exhaustion an illness shaped merely by context?

Is exhaustion changed by place and time?

The keynote, from Professor Sir Simon Wessely, focused on the phenomenon of the syndrome that came to be known as neurasthenia in the late 1880s and how it would likely be described today as CFS-ME, (or Chronic Fatigue Syndrome and other aliases). Wessely spoke about how neurasthenia was, in its day, not only a ‘fashionable disease’ but also one of some minor prestige, assumed to be caused by ‘high-level’ brain work. Contrasting this episode with a history of exhaustion (in western medicine), Wessely then spoke about working in the UK as part of the medical research into Chronic Fatigue Syndrome or CFS-ME, before finally speaking of the tension between his psychiatric research and the sufferers of these complex conditions.

Some of the day dealt with the semantic importance of definitions of exhaustion in regard to the work place. Wilmar Schaufeli (Social and Behavioural Sciences, Utrecht) contrasted and evaluated the terms ‘burnout’ and ‘exhaustion’, an element of which paralleled with Wessely’s talk on neurasthenia. Like neurasthenia, the phenomenon of burnout was seen here as being an almost honourable and

⁶⁹ I have since been invited by Laws to be a member of the project’s advisory panel at Durham University.

certainly socially accepted term of over-work. Schaufeli concluded however, that 'burnout' was not an exchangeable term with exhaustion and that its main use revolves around the legal implications of using the term, and he highlighted to what degree employees are legally vulnerable or protected by such terms and their semantics. I found this contextually relevant in regards to the tide of benefit cuts currently being accelerated by the UK government in 2014.

Greta Wagner (Sociology, Frankfurt) examined the stress and quickening of demands in the work place and also looked at sick leave - specifically in relation to burnout. Burnout as a term was highlighted here as being very prevalent outside the UK, being the exhausted term of choice in the German work place. Wagner also spoke of the explosion in burnout-related sick days in the last ten years.

Julian Childs (Anna Freud Centre, University College London) examined the perfectionist ideal of 'impossible standards' of achievement in the workplace. He also spent time focusing on what happens when those standards are imposed outside of the individual's volition.

Angela Woods (Medical Humanities, Durham) looked at the relationship between depression, exhaustion and labour via three recent literary monographs, and used this three-way dialogue to integrate both the biomedical and popular views of such conditions.

An engaging presentation from Felicity Callard (Medical Humanities, Durham) spoke of an ongoing collaboration she had engineered with a neuroimaging specialist,

and how this could challenge the idea of the 'resting' mind and the idea of 'down-time' or 'passivity' of the brain.

There were two remaining speakers, the presentations of which I will mention with higher magnification shortly (Dr Jenny Laws and Michael Greaney).

Why this was an important event for my research project

I was keen to attend (and present a paper on the vinyl trilogy) at this Wellcome Trust funded event. I had been looking for articulate and scholarly enquiries isolating the phenomena of exhaustion since the start of my research project in order to orientate myself and place my work in the most relevant contexts. The Canterbury symposium therefore, was an opportunity to 'up-periscope' and look for places in which to land my three vinyl records and experiences – and also ascertain if my project did contribute to knowledge within the field of medical humanities. There were many questions about the project afterwards and Simon Wessely and Angela Woods tweeted aspects of my talk live on twitter (@bovinelife is my account name) – here are four tweets from both Durham University's Centre for Medical Humanities and Simon Wessely on the day:

Medical Humanities @mdiclhumanities · Oct25: @bovinelife's
M.E.Thodologies of exhausted practitioner; exquisite sounds from
idioholistic vinyl trilogy <http://idioholism.com> #exhaustion
(Woods, 2013)

Medical Humanities @mdiclhumanities · Oct 25 Does predicament co-author the work? @bovinelife on the arts practice of the 'exhausted practitioner': <http://idioholism.com> #exhaustion
(ibid)

Simon Wessely @WesselyS · Oct 25 Chris Dooks @bovinelife talking about his art, illness and CFS. Worth following. #exhaustion
(Wessely, 2013)

Simon Wessely @WesselyS · Oct 25 @bovinelife tells audience that vinyl record has re emerged in popular culture. Shame that @clarercgp threw ours out last month #exhaustion
(ibid)

I was keen to attend not only for exhaustion being explored in and outside of medicine but equally important was the sense that I wasn't working in isolation. Whilst being the only arts PaR researcher in what was subtitled a 'workshop' on exhaustion, I was excited by the idea that I may even have *peers* working in their own disciplines in terrain that overlapped with mine. My exhaustion due to CFS-ME increasingly isolates me, so the notion of having several facets of the same enquiry discussed in one room was very appealing.

In terms of surveying the project's relationship to new knowledge in academic terms, it may serve the project to speak about how artists (especially ones who are ill) encounter the institution *per se*. Of course, this need for orientation does not just affect sick artists. It appears to be a likely route for any creative doctoral practitioners (and those of other disciplines) working within institutions. I think there are a few possible explanations to account for a need for contextual relevance that may be

different from those researchers who are practicing through more traditional ranks of academia:

(i) Trajectories: Artists often work alone, and frequently to their own agendas. They are often self-employed and, to a degree, self-supported. Context helps steer work into more steadfast trajectories. Context helps the artist-researcher and those institutions that s/he is working with. This is less of a problem for the artist who is not pursuing a doctoral project. At symposia like these, artist explorations may happily collide with the progressive elements of academia as well as traditional academic protocols. To use an exhaustion antonym, being in the centre of these oscillations is very *energising*.

(ii) “The context is half the work” This ‘problem’ of context, some argue, is a direct part of the work. The artist couple Barbara Steveni and John Latham founded the *Artist Placement Group* (APG) in London in 1966, to arrange invitations for artists to take up residencies at various companies throughout Britain. Alongside sympathetic motivations from other members of the APG, such as artist Robert Rauschenberg – it was at a show in 1970, at Germany’s Kunsthalle Dusseldorf, that a tenet of the group was expounded, stating that ‘*the context is half the work*’ [of artists working in specific places, residencies and organisations] (Eleey, 2007)

In producing my own work under various frameworks, I have discovered that the ‘contextual search’ is part of professional art practice. Far from it being a distraction, locating context is probably a central influence within the praxis of a research project which uses artistic means.

To return to the symposium, The *Exhaustion* event was framed as a modest workshop where there was limited space for the public. A distilled form of my research titled “*The M.E.thodologies of the Fragmented Filmmaker*” was accepted and the organisers made special arrangements for the physical difficulties of travel and presenting on the day. I would be the first speaker after the keynote, Prof. Sir Simon Wessely.

I was worried that a whole day of these very different discourses and perspectives on exhaustion could be a difficult day to for me to process: not just in the cognising and processing of information *on* the day, but in the worry that I would be too sick to present my own work, and have to cancel. It was difficult and I was sick for a month afterwards, but I was extremely keen to hear the other voices in a modern discourse on exhaustion, and in a way the event was similarly encountered as the methodology I employ in my audio work.

In my own work, especially in my LP *CIGA{R}LES*, there exists an exhausted methodology: I use festivals and single days (such as symposia) where *variety is in one place*⁷⁰, and is recorded in its entirety to be unpacked and edited over several weeks. This is a technique learned in filmmaking, where as much variety of shots as possible are sought in one single location. Fiscal and energetic economy are linked here. A director on a film shoot tries to find variety of scenes as close together as possible to keeps costs down: I now do this to keep energy down. This is an *M.E.thodology*, as highlighted earlier. If a good location with a variety of experience is found, then although that very difficult day is documented in finite detail in a fairly low energy way

⁷⁰ The technique is echoed in the sleevenotes of *CIGA{R}LES*

by digital recorders, video and still images, it can provide enough source material for a major artwork or several thousand written words. *CIGA{R}LES* and the *Exhaustion* symposium/workshop are related in this way.

In flagging the other speakers' presentations at this event, I am also surveying other 'contributions to knowledge' in relation to this project. There were two other contributors present at the compacted survey of the field of exhaustion. I cite these examples because they examine exhaustion narratives through resonant case-studies (fellow patients). They discuss patients being 'active' in a way I have been lucky enough to do in my creative practice, as Jennifer Laws profiles in her research:

Dr Jennifer Laws University of Durham

ENERGY, EXHUASTION AND THE ACTIVE PATIENT

From Laws' abstract:

Throughout history, ideas about the healthy self as an active self have varied, yet in contemporary conceptualisations of self and society, such notions have acquired unprecedented currency: in the context of healthcare we might think for example of, 'active aging' or 'activation therapy' or public health campaigns such as the 'Active Five a Day', as well as shifts in healthcare politics in which patients are re-conceptualised as active partners in doctor-patient relations and in service planning and research (and beyond this to Big Society and other activation discourses). Both in professional and patient-led narratives of illness and recovery, two important aspects of such discourse are

energy and desire (wanting to get better and working hard to do so).

(Laws, n.d.)

Dr Laws' research project explores the discourses and paradoxes of 'active patients'. Patients with (for example) exhaustion-orientated illnesses are often asked to pursue treatments such as 'graded exercise' and take charge of their recovery. However examples such as the 'graded exercise' question in CFS-ME has led to many fierce debates within CFS-ME communities as to the efficacy and appropriateness of such prescriptions.

'Maria' is clearly ill and exhausted. We do not know the details of her illness. She considers herself not to be disabled (at least in the afternoon) and this is a reasonably positive and optimistic opening salvo full of metaphor – *"Deep inside me, in here [points to chest]. It's dormant at the moment, to start with. This is my energy"* and her account expands to give the impression as being one of experience. Maria seems to have both control and acceptance to a degree, of her condition. She sounds at ease with herself.

It's all about energy. I suppose I know I have it, but it's not really doing anything. I make a cup of tea and I take it back to bed. I read the news. I fuel my body with fresh orange juice. The seed flickers, dances, then goes out again.

(Case study 'Maria' in Laws, n.d.)

What Maria is talking about here resonates a little with me. A few minutes after waking each day, I perform an ‘early energy evaluation’ which I refer to (to myself) as my ‘mid-morning report’ and I usually know within a few minutes how the day will likely pan-out energy-wise, although as I age and my condition worsens, energy for me can drop suddenly at any time. Generally however, like many people who are exhausted, afternoons are often the peak time of the day. Maria’s experience is similar: *It is mid-day or early afternoon when I will fire up and the energy becomes strong and steady. At this point, I am activated, I don’t consider myself ill anymore because I am not faking my activities, acting ‘as if’ I had some enthusiasm, I’m just running on what comes natural.*” (ibid)

‘Jess’ and her story are less clear-cut. It contrasts with the above, and is fuelled with anger – she has depression, and her counselling session has not gone well. In fact, her counsellor doesn’t sound very insightful at all and is beginning to make me a little angry at his/her dated rhetoric *‘My counsellor told me that if I was depressed that must mean I want to be depressed.’* (ibid)

I’m immediately taken back to sessions I’ve had with ‘new age therapists’ and certain health professionals telling me of my ‘wanting’ to be ill. When I was newly diagnosed, I recall a charismatic NHS physiotherapist telling me “I don’t think you are ready to get well yet, Chris” – a statement hardly appropriate for anyone with a painfully debilitating or life-changing illness. It would be hard to imagine this being said to someone with Leukaemia, but common with ‘invisible illnesses’. Therefore Jess’s

counsellor in this presentation piques my attention. The story of health professionals ‘blaming’ patients rarely leaves the back of my mind, reminding me of the Susan Sontag mantra I frequently turn to – because it is continually necessary “*Any important disease whose causality is murky, and for which treatment is ineffectual, tends to be awash in significance*” (Sontag, 1978, p62)

Sontag highlighted the dangers of ignorance around illnesses where there is lack of information in both how they arise and how they operate. In *Illness as Metaphor*, she shows how in this vacuum of information, society risks filling the space with ill-conceived conjecture born out of judgments and prejudice, and such is my experience with CFS-ME. We saw this kind of prejudice arise in recent epidemics, such as in debates about AIDS in the 1980s (i.e. one’s illicit behaviour results in ‘karmic consequences’) and also with cancer (where one’s illness follows a reverse path – a tragic victim narrative, but a judgment nevertheless).

Next, Laws presents ‘Jack’ and his story as a positive CFS-ME tale orientated around the support he was getting for his CFS-ME

They offered me an assistance dog for the CFS-ME – to do the fetching and the carrying and give me a bit of pull on the lead, literally, you know, save a bit of energy when I’m walking. Did you know they did that? ...When I’m stuck in bed sometimes, I imagine machines. At first I

thought of a robot suit with rocket packs and huge mechanical limbs so I would be strong and powerful.

(Laws, n.d.)

Jack seems to have great support and external medical belief in his illness.

What makes this resonate for me is that I have had the same 'robotic' dream. It might serve to cite a couple of contemporary references here. This weakness of body and imaging a kind of 'exoskeleton' to literally help the sufferer become mobile was realised in two recent sci-fi films *Prometheus* (2012) and *Elysium* (2013) – both saw people who were very physically drained through viruses or old age, plugged into an exoskeleton with pneumatic assistance coupled with a fast processor full of data (*Elysium*) connected into the skull.

Dr Michael Greaney Lancaster University

EXHAUSTION AND MODERNIST LITERATURE

In *On Being Ill*, Virginia Woolf wrote:

Considering how common illness is, how tremendous the spiritual change that it brings, how astonishing, when the lights of health go down, the undiscovered countries that are then disclosed, what wastes and deserts of the soul a slight attack of influenza brings to light...it becomes strange indeed that illness has not taken its place with love, battle, and jealousy among the prime themes of literature. Novels, one

would have thought, would have been devoted to influenza; epic poems to typhoid; odes to pneumonia, lyrics to toothache. But no; ... literature does its best to maintain that its concern is with the mind; that the body is a sheet of plain glass through which the soul looks straight and clear. (Woolf, 1926, pp.4, 5)

This presentation introduced me to Woolf's 1926 essay (excerpt above) and was a paper that concentrated on examples from the literary arts in relation to exhaustion. .

Given that I have flagged how difficult the written word can be for me I nevertheless engaged with this presentation. I am more familiar with later twentieth century literature and prior to the presentation I was keen to see how the 'body' or 'embodied' fiction I'd read such as William S Burroughs' *Naked Lunch* (Burroughs, 1959) for example, would compare with Greaney's focus on earlier modernist literature. If the quote from Virginia Woolf reflected the situation, she seemed to be rather disparaging of the literature of the time. In this aspect of the symposium we discovered examples exploring both different types of exhaustion and we encountered how energy is written about during that period and of the power of the first-person account of such phenomena. Retrospectively, literature of this time may be read as an archive of the ways in which states of extreme tiredness and fatigue have been perceived. Greaney further interprets literature of the time to be:

...an imaginative record of the fears, desires and fantasies that have attached themselves to the prospect of exhaustion. And it can give us vivid approximations of the phenomenology of exhaustion – that is, the first-person experience of what it actually feels like to be exhausted.

(Greaney, n.d.)

Communicating what it ‘feels’ like to be exhausted is a central aspect of my research and this presentation gave me further confidence that the interest in first-person knowledge is spreading across academia and research in the wider sense. For artists, hoping to root themselves academically in this field, perhaps investigations into phenomenology will become less esoteric.

Whether artists will embrace the term ‘phenomenology’ remains to be seen. It’s worth flagging that phenomenology is a term aligned to a particular slice of emic or ‘insider’ research, to which writers can also be seen as to having access of, through their individualistic research methods. And if the field grows in acceptance, perhaps first-person research will develop also across more fields. This ‘academisation’ of first person experience is growing and being debated.

Another part of Greaney’s presentation resonated with me. I have mentioned that I am sometimes gently goaded for being a fairly prolific artist whilst being ill. This appears to be a contradiction or paradox noticed by others. I have made a lot of work because I have developed what I describe here as ‘idioholic’ strategies, so it’s interesting to me that when Greaney surveys a paradox of exhaustion in literature of

the late nineteenth and early twentieth-century he finds it to be “curiously energised” by the “spectacle” of exhaustion.

In the talk, Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* is flagged for being seemingly inexhaustible and relentless “preying on his victims for a good half a millennium” and the Martians in HG Wells’ *War of the Worlds* never sleep. Meanwhile, Oscar Wilde’s *Dorian Gray* grants his own body immunity from exhaustion. It’s an interesting paradox, that literature in the wider sense was ‘passionate’ or obsessed with exhaustion and the examples he flags do back up this ‘enthusiasm’ for articulating exhaustion in what must have been idiosyncratic narratives of the time. And it is this idiosyncrasy that held my attention.

The end of the paper is very familiar territory to me also:

What is exhausting about exhaustion is its non-finality; it seems to draw on perverse reserves of energy, to prolong itself beyond its natural life-span, producing an excruciating state of sleepiness without sleep; tiredness without repose.

(Greaney, n.d.)

These ‘perverse reserves of energy’ form kinds of paradoxes in my own life, hinted in the preface to this exegesis such as being ‘too exhausted to sleep’ or ‘hyper aroused’, concepts that are not culturally very well understood. Greaney noted that there are ‘inequalities in exhaustion’ before concluding and emphasising (as I began in

this chapter) a further need for cultural context in which to read this literary history of the subject.

Not everyone gets to be exhausted in the same way; not everyone gets to take ownership of the meaning of his or her own exhaustion. An aesthetic of exhaustion thus needs to be accompanied by a politics of exhaustion, and modernist literature might provide a valuable resource for formulating both.

(Greaney, n.d.)

6. Conclusion: A self-reflective account of the successes and failures of the project

At the start of this chapter on the project's contribution to knowledge we discovered that:

Heidegger argues that we do not come to “know” the world theoretically through contemplative knowledge in the first instance. Rather, we come to know the world theoretically only after we have come to understand it through handling.

(Boldt, in Barrett and Boldt, 2010, p30)

...and that, in research methods such as bricolage there is an “undetermined quality to creative activity, in which the end is not specified in advance”(Sim, 2005, p178).

Artists' research does not always answer a neat proposition. Instead, given the exploratory nature of PaR doctorates, and in particular in the conceptual ambition and breadth of *The Idioholism Vinyl Trilogy*, it is no surprise to see that questions lead to other questions – in a sense forming what was described in the chapter on holism as types of ‘metatrajectory’ (Tarnass 1996, p 440). So what are some of these questions?

Some thoughts drawing the process to a close could be:

a) What applications of idiosyncratic strategies drawn from contemporary art methodologies (such as this one) might enable CFS-ME sufferers to enjoy everyday life in more satisfying and integrated ways?

b) At the end of the research will the contemporary art practitioner have forged a kind of 'holism' through art methodologies – the term understood in complementary health care for example?

c) How can the kind of pain, exhaustion and cognitive difficulties of the illness which usually prevents activity of many kinds, be usurped, negated or negotiated with?

In a sense only individuals practicing their own 'idioholism' can answer these questions, and moreover, my project is not directly located in 'self-help' culture. This is despite suggesting a little instruction to follow the exercises I have expounded in the sleeve notes or in the chapter on bricolage, or with greater magnification in the chapter on idioholism. Essentially, despite flagging the breadth of the project, a simple question which led to the entire research, was posited in chapter one as:

If three idiosyncratic contemporary art projects were developed by an averagely affected sufferer of CFS-ME, across three different, even divergent subject areas, what process and shape would such projects need to take in order to foster the practitioner with a more satisfyingly engaged existence?

PaR research questions are not unanswerable. Indeed this exegesis has attempted to partner the art-objects that form part of the response to the above question. Rather, PaR outcomes will be difficult to answer through any kind of 'objective knowledge', as we laid out at the start of this chapter. In a sense, any

transferability of the ideas in the research will be completed by the audience of the project. This hopefully happens in two ways.

1. On the LPs, the audience 'unify' the 'fragmented films' – in other words, the audience make their own links, synaptic pathways, connections and unifications of the personal 'whole' I present as such fragments. There is a degree of interpretation required, or light interaction with the records - whether the audience has CFS-ME or not.

2. Secondly, for those *with* CFS-ME, there may be opportunities to forge their own idiosyncrasy based on the simple research question and perhaps some of the writing on the idea of triangulation (chapter 1 and chapter 7).

In this project, I've developed several experimental exercises designed to offset my illness and keep me working as an artist. The process and the objects themselves explored both the conceptual value of the ideas and the actualisation of those ideas into art-objects. This has been a large project and not without problems. One of the problems has been one of public 'suspicion' that I'm not really unwell. I noted earlier that music magazine *The Wire* questions me as someone 'who describes themselves as an exhausted artist should be making so much' (Bell, 2013, p 51) Ironically, as I conclude this project, perhaps it simply means some of it may have *worked*, or that I have managed to temporarily out-fox my symptoms. Let us briefly outline how someone with an exhaustion-related illness, or another kind of disadvantage / disability may be a prolific art-maker.

We may find it helpful to look at the idea that art is a form of bias. Artists can claim with some certainty, that by its nature, artistic practice necessitates a kind of discrimination.

As we encountered in the sleevenotes of CIGA{R}LES, no facet of art or music (or any other facet of life for that matter), can contain the sum of all phenomena, - although the desire may exist in some practitioners to create a 'magnum opus' to explain and investigate the known and even unknown. That aside, the arts generally follow a trajectory; be it aesthetic, conceptual, sensory, or intellectual.

If we agree that neither human life nor art can contain everything, it follows that the practice of any cultural construction involves isolating and editing down fragments of phenomena into written, sonic, photographed or drawn creations. The word creation might also be misleading. One may equally think of an art practice as skilful 'removals' - selecting or peeling back a particular line of enquiry to reveal the core of the work.

Artworks are created by biases and discriminations, both intentional and not. To reiterate a phrase in the sleevenotes of CIGA{R}LES, art *is* bias. Given that we know little of the universe...

...it is reasonable to assume human perception *itself* is a form of bias - unless one is omnipotent. So even before we start to make anything, only a slither of life is going to fit on the page, on the soundtrack, within the sculpture, in the frame and so on – this is the practical architecture

which will influence the kind of bias, constraints, process and outcome of any work.

(CIGA{R}LES, Dooks, 2013)

Added to this, there are unpredictable events that will sculpt the work further before any artistic gesture occurs:

...Everyday life will impose limitations onto artists; problems with budgets, ability, time frame, and so on.

(ibid)

It would be reasonable to assume that the factors above, combined with severe exhaustion must limit the development or opportunities of an artist afflicted by CFS-ME but is this really the case? Returning to CIGA{R}LES, I asked:

To what extent is there any benefit in welcoming unpleasant and inconvenient limitations as part of the process of making a piece?

Additionally, does 'predicament' (such as illness) itself co-author work?

[If our cultural definitions are inclusive enough] ...perhaps predicament need not be an enemy of the sick or disabled practitioner.

(ibid)

If we think of predicament as an active agent in the process when placed within a reliably persistent illness, then this predicament – of time, attention and energy limited by illness - is already doing a lot of the work of editing. This aspect alone

permits some energy saving and underpins the research project. So much of life is removed from the exhausted artist already, so much is impossible, that it reveals a limited horizon. However, a limited horizon is no less of a horizon than what passes for a 'full' and satisfactory human life.

To make cultural works under constraints and restrictions is in keeping with both the mainstream history of western art (where, for example, Da Vinci and Michelangelo had miserable health for much of their lives) but also in other narratives and sources where restrictions are part of the process. In Chapter 3, I discussed the French writer Georges Perec writing an entire novel without the letter 'e' (*A Void*) (Perec, 2008) and I referred to the Temporary Services project *Prisoners' Inventions*, (Angelo and Score, 2003) where a kettle can be made resourcefully from a paperclip and a plastic cup, then translated, through the agency of 'art', from the context of imprisonment into public exhibition and debate.

I count *Prisoners' Inventions* as high-level research into resourcefulness. Perhaps it is not simply a romantic myth to suggest that creativity arises out of adversity or shackles, or appears when it is needed. In this light, perhaps those constrained by illness or individualistic symptoms might have already encountered a sense of editing and shaping of their cultural constructions because those who are experienced with illness – a little like Illich's concept of the 'art of suffering' (Illich, 1976, pp.131-132). Such sufferers are aware of what both is and isn't achievable. In the 'healthy' perhaps there is more of a risk of procrastination because so much is possible. As I phrased it in CIGA{R}LES sleevenotes: *Could this be one of the few advantages of being an ill practitioner?*

Sick artists may not earn much money for their output, so a project like this perhaps is better seen to be about the value of art processes and of empowerment, and of the value of an art practice as a source of nourishment and information. LP3 was the final record to be produced, and probably represents the most reflexive practice I had developed during the process. In the final chapter of the trilogy of objects I made for the work... *'I was able to exploit and refine limitations. Whilst this [degree of adaptation] won't be possible for all ill practitioners, I did manage to implement my limitations into a collection of individualistic wellbeing methodologies'* (ibid).

Because of the production of these three records, I have been able to refine a suite of behavioural techniques aimed at emancipating myself - but with an eye on the exhausted individuals who also have an art practice, or would like one. My future goal is to design projects that are neither for the exhausted or the well: simply approachable projects aimed at the curious.

Let us finally sum up the narrative of the project.

I described how I was a film maker, how my career was going well just before I became ill. I had just completed my first big project, a South Bank Show I had written and directed before I was due to make a six-week documentary on Native American Rock Art in California.

I then examined my relationship with bricolage and the 'downfall' and re-assembling of my career. I wrote of how when I was an 'independent' director, I may have been a kind of 'holist' in my work (some say control freak), frequently writing,

shooting and editing all my material, including writing the music and mixing the soundtrack. I described how my ambition led to a cluster of broadcast television commissions in the late 1990s before I fell ill.

Then I reflected that: *When the filmmaker falls apart, his films fall apart too.*

My films drifted apart or fragmented - in the sense of my only being able to pursue very small clusters of audio, music, writing and photographic works. When I initially became ill, my megalomania still existed, but I couldn't attempt another film. So I redefined myself as an artist. Adaptations began to evolve, such as a bricolage methodology and using timers to make more modular works, and at the same time although I wasn't making works over a large breadth of time, I was developing more depth in projects that I hadn't uncovered before.

Before the research project there wasn't much 'academically reflexive' work in my history - I was making photographs, sonic art pieces and microfiction. I needed to unpick how it was possible for me to be active in this way. I certainly didn't feel like a filmmaker. At the start of this project, I expounded my reflexive processes as "M.E.thodologies" across aggregates of sound, photography, graphics and writing. As I progressed deeper into the project, it led to my awareness that sound, photography, graphics and writing happened to be the building blocks of *films*. An epiphany followed; I was still a kind of filmmaker, but one who can only work with fragments of his previously healthy life. A fragmented filmmaker. Immediately, the search was on for the ideal 'container' of this fragmented life to present and investigate it. It required

incorporating the artwork, the sound and music projects, and somewhere to place a kind of textual element and principal photography.

The re-emergence of the vinyl record into popular culture allowed for all of these elements of the fragmented film to be presented. The timing was excellent to make three records about exhaustion – *as records*.

In this text, I covered how my pursuing of three projects, different enough from each other, may lead to a return to living a kind of varied holistic life, despite not being able to leave the house much. I outlined a rough template of mind/body/soul as shorthand for these records and their branches of research, a blunt metaphor for the aspects of my psyche affected by my illness. CFS-ME affects the full strata of the individual. As a result, a minimum of three headings became the foundation for my 'proto-syllabus' of complementary projects, which arose out of my behavioural methods for daily living - under both the illness and my art practice.

We may remind ourselves of the headings. They arose out of where I felt it hurt most for CFS-ME sufferers; they are excluded from society, from disability funding, from being treated fairly in capacity for work tests – a long list could easily be generated, but I generated three personal headings for areas which could serve the artist with CFS-ME well: -

1. Art as 'Immediate Triage'
2. Art as 'Cosmological Portal'
3. Art as 'Perceptual Enhancer and Appropriator'

As we conclude, let us again unpick these strange headings. Here I survey them for the last time in the order they were made.

M.E.thodology 1 - Art as 'Immediate Triage'

As with the striking association one has with the image of a red cross, blood-red vinyl was chosen here as an ideal colour for 'first aid by art' or 'art as immediate triage' as I termed it in chapter 1 - and the record was *The Eskdalemuir Harmonium*. These were sound works which both had an influence on my nervous system but also works that helped me make metaphors about my collapsing life. So the first record, about a decaying harmonium in Eskdalemuir, was produced. This helped me investigate atrophy, torpor and loss – and allowed me to exercise a little whilst making sonic balms that required the gentle use of my pedalling feet to power the harmonium. This research attracted some attention and it soon got published – in Canada. At the time of writing, it is still for sale with the electronic download included. If I were to criticise myself, this one record could have been a research project in itself, but I set on the idea of widening the benefits of my bricolage practice across other aspects of my life and I continued to make more work. I wanted the project to be as 'holistic' as possible and experiment with the idea of triangulation. It would be amiss not to speak about the risk between depth of idea versus breadth of enterprise, but I felt it would be a mistake not to pursue the project with what I felt were the minimum constituent parts to qualify my pursuit as remotely 'holistic.' As a result, although the works appear sequential, as we discovered in the chapter on holism, whole and part may be considered as indivisible perspectives regarding one entity.

M.E.thodology 2 - Art as 'Cosmological Portal'

Blue vinyl was the core of the next record, the colour chosen to mirror the visible atmosphere of the earth. *300 Square Miles of Upwards* was published jointly by Woodend Barn Arts in Banchory and the University of the West of Scotland. The hypothesis that informed this record was that if society bypasses the CFS-ME sufferer, the sufferer could simply bypass society and learn about the stars. This album features economical aphorisms about the universe and international voices (some of the record is in Polish and also Japanese). I was doing a little research on how my memory is improved when data is set to music and on that theme, I was looking at Oliver Sacks' work in the field where dementia sufferers may recall music and songs verbatim. In retrospect, this record has failings: perhaps I should have set more of the statements to music as songs. On the positive side there are other M.E.thodologies within the sleevenotes to have made it a worthwhile, 'cosmic' segment of the trilogy.

M.E.thodology 3 – Art as 'Perceptual Enhancer' and 'Appropriator.'

Finally, on yellow vinyl, chosen for a literal emphasis on the sun (e.g. in Provence where I recorded insects in hot climates) *CIGA[R]LES* looked at how the exhausted practitioner can author work simply by choosing where to point a microphone (sonic appropriation) and use the microphone as a kind of instrument. Applied both to my home and in Provence, the 'perceptual enhancer' aspect comes from an experiment where I placed a field recorder on a window for eight hours a day recording my environment, when I was too ill to leave the house. I then spent the evenings listening back to the day, and when my condition hit a good spell, I would

start to edit this material into compositions and reflect on any insights. The idea of deliberately going to a place where within one square kilometre, one could find representatives from several nations, allowed me to develop a related international soundscape – without travelling to those locales themselves.

By the time I had reached this final record, I felt I had become deeply immersed in strategies in which unwell artists like myself can make conceptual work and remain authors of cultural projects. Sometimes this is a very subtle and contemplative process, negating needing a lot of energy for such projects or without interfering with the subject too much. These self-reflexive projects, brought together within a set of art behaviours and principles are ready for further testing and exploration. The three records, with their extended downloads are the summation of many hours worth of such explorations and as a result, the ‘risk’ I spoke of in producing three records has produced an expansive archive in and of itself.

In the prologue of this writing I talked about how I’d started buying vinyl again after a huge gap of twenty-five years. How when I now pick up a handful of records, I can barely lift them, but they are worth the effort. I spoke about how there is something in the format, in the weight, the physicality and the *gravitas* of vinyl records that would ultimately serve as my witness – even an epitaph to me after I am gone, and I smiled as I wrote *they don’t call them records for nothing*.

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⁷¹ 'Angelo' is a protected name / pseudonym for the author

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7. Archive Material⁷²

Dooks/Clare, P. (n.d.) Field Notes recorded by Chris Dooks, Ayr

Dooks/Kossoff, G. (n.d.) Field Notes recorded by Chris Dooks, Ayr

⁷² These two field notes entries are simply my personal notes from direct contact with the named individuals. When I have quoted said individuals, it has been from these sources.

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It is the nature of CFS-ME to forget names, and whilst this doesn't excuse any omissions, I am sure I will have made some – and ask for your understanding regarding my occasionally ineffective recall.

Kind regards and I hope you enjoyed the research project.

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